



Leader Handbook



A Note to Our Leaders

Thank you for choosing to partner with Xperitas on your upcoming program abroad!

The coming months will be filled with exciting preparations, and we hope this handbook will serve as a helpful tool to keep all your planning materials well organized. Please read through the enclosed handbook.

We will send you monthly Looking Ahead emails to keep you informed about important program resources, deadlines and details. We strongly encourage you to read and save these emails, as they are filled with helpful dates, deadlines and tips! We will also include you on the monthly Navigator emails to your student travelers and their parents/guardians.

We encourage you and your students to visit and contribute to our blog (xperitas.org/blog). You can also stay connected to Xperitas by following us on Facebook (facebook.com/xperitas) and on Instagram ([@XperitasOrg](https://www.instagram.com/XperitasOrg)).

We look forward to working with you this year. If you have any questions, remember that your Xperitas Program Manager is just an email or phone call away!

Bon Voyage! ¡Buen Viaje! Buon viaggio! Gute Reise!



Table of Contents

PAYMENTS & CANCELLATIONS

Billing & Payments, Change of Leaders, Cancellations	1
Refund Timeline, Cancellation Schedules	3

PRE-DEPARTURE MEETINGS

Covering the Bases	4
Pre-Departure Meeting Topics	4
Student Meetings	5

RESOURCES

Online Educational Resources	5
Critical Thinking Activities	6

LEADER CHECKLIST

Program Planning Center	10
-------------------------	----

GROUND TRAVEL TIPS

Travel on Foot	12
Travel by Train	12
Travel by Bus	13
Hotel Stays	14
Technology Use	16
Dining Out	18
Money	19

AIR TRAVEL

Air Travel Checklist	20
Required Travel Documents, Carry-On Packing List	22
Airline Changes	23

THE FAMILY STAY EXPERIENCE®

How Host Families are Chosen	24
FAQs about the Family Stay	28
Post Family Stay	30

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Insurance, Health & Safety	32
Xperitas Contact Information	34
U.S. Embassy & Consulate Information	35
Replacing a Passport or Other Important Documents	36

POST-TRAVEL

Post-Travel Checklist, Resources	38
----------------------------------	----

PAYMENTS & CANCELLATIONS

Billing & Payments

Participants are responsible for making all applicable payments according to the schedule for their program (available on the participant's Xperitas portal). Participants will receive two payment reminders before each payment deadline, and the final balance will be available on the participant Xperitas portal around 2-4 weeks before the final payment deadline. Payments can be made with a debit/credit card on their Xperitas portal or by check or money order mailed to Xperitas. A \$40 late fee will be applied to all late payments.

Change of Leader(s)

Xperitas reserves the right to select a qualified replacement for any group leader unable or unwilling to travel. Such changes do not constitute grounds for cancellation without penalty. The standard cancellation policy applies.

Cancellations

Xperitas does not offer cancel-for-any-reason insurance. All travelers who would like trip cancellation insurance for non-medical reasons are encouraged to purchase additional travel insurance independently.

Individual Participant Cancellations

Voluntary cancellations must be submitted either via the self-cancellation feature on the Xperitas portal or in writing (email is acceptable) by the participant or participant's parent/guardian directly to Xperitas, clearly indicating the participant's name, school, and program destination country. Please also include a home address, as refunds are sent by check through the postal mail. Refunds can be issued back to a credit/debit card ONLY IF the same card is used for all payments made to Xperitas. Cancellations should be emailed to: cancel@xperitas.org. Xperitas cannot accept voluntary cancellations made by phone or requested by the teacher for the student.

Medically-Related Cancellations

When a participant cancels due to health reasons prior to departure, Xperitas' regular cancellation policy applies. The cancellation insurance included in the program price is only for medically-related causes affecting the participant or a member of the participant's immediate family. The maximum coverage amount (\$1,000) is applied against the incurred loss calculated as of the date Xperitas receives the written cancellation. A physician's statement and signature will be required for any medical claim; Xperitas will provide insurance forms to be submitted by the participant. For more information, please refer to the complete insurance information on the [Xperitas website \(www.xperitas.org\)](http://www.xperitas.org).

Involuntary Cancellations

Xperitas reserves the right to cancel a student for lack of payment or for failure to abide by the standards set by the group leader and/or school. In both cases the standard cancellation fees will apply.

Whole Group Cancellations

- Upon the final enrollment deadline, should the group leader(s) decide to cancel the program due to low enrollment, all participants will receive a full refund of all monies paid.
- Xperitas uses the U.S. State Department Travel Advisory system to determine if a region or country is safe for travel. Travel advisory levels range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating “exercise normal precautions” and 4 indicating “do not travel”. Leading up to a group’s departure, if the U.S. Department of State elevates the travel advisory level of a region or destination on the itinerary to a level 3 or 4, Xperitas will evaluate the situation to determine the safety of travel to these regions and destinations. This includes travel advisory level changes due to unforeseeable world events, such as terrorism, violence, natural disasters and pandemics. Travel restrictions or bans issued by the destination government, including Tribal Governments, would be subject to the same cancellation policy. When cancellations are initiated by either Xperitas, the group leader, the school administration or district due to a State Department advisory level change or destination government restrictions, Xperitas will work with group leaders to modify the itinerary/destination. These changes may result in additional charges. If the program cannot be modified and is cancelled, regardless of the time of cancellation, Xperitas will do everything in its power to work with the airline and other vendors to obtain the greatest refund possible. Please note that the amount of the refund will be reduced by any air and land arrangements that we are unable to recover at the time of cancellation and by the administrative fee (see schedules below) that covers organizational resources used in the planning of the language/cultural immersion program.

Refund Timeline

All refunds will be issued by check in the name of the student traveler. Please allow 4-6 weeks for Xperitas to process a cancellation and issue a refund check. Refunds can be issued back to a credit/debit card ONLY IF the same card is used for all payments made to Xperitas.

2026 Cancellation Schedules

Programs Departing In March & April

DATE OF CANCELATION	REFUND AMOUNT
Through October 1, 2025	Refund of all money paid MINUS a \$100 administrative fee
October 2 - November 14, 2025	Refund of all money paid, minus a \$250 administrative fee*
November 15, 2025 or later	Refund of all money paid MINUS a \$500 administrative fee*, and any air/land expenses. Expenses vary by program and cancellation date.
30 Days Prior to Departure	No refund possible

Programs Departing In May - August

DATE OF CANCELATION	REFUND AMOUNT
Through October 15, 2025	Refund of all money paid MINUS a \$100 administrative fee
October 16 - November 30, 2025	Refund of all money paid, minus a \$250 administrative fee*
December 1, 2025 or later	Refund of all money paid MINUS a \$500 administrative fee*, and any air/land expenses. Expenses vary by program and cancellation date
30 Days Prior to Departure	No refund possible

**This fee is to help cover the cost of organizational resources incurred in the planning of the language/cultural immersion experience.*

Based on availability, cancelled participants may re-enroll by submitting any missing payments plus a \$40 fee and any applicable changes in airline costs. Payment must be made by cashier's check or money order.

PRE-DEPARTURE MEETING TOPICS

Passports & Visas

- Refer to the Required Travel Documents sheet in the Air Travel section (page 22).
- Remind parents to apply for students' passports NOW or ensure existing passports are valid for at least 6 months after their return date.
- Encourage parents to visit www.travel.state.gov for instructions on how to apply for a passport.
- Ensure all travelers (U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens) apply for a visa, if necessary. It is the participant's responsibility to check destination requirements and obtain any necessary visas/ documentation for entry abroad or return to the United States well before the program's departure date. Failure to do so could lead to the participant not being allowed to board flights, being sent back to the United States upon arrival in the destination country or facing issues when re-entering the United States. Group leaders should share this openly with students early on and collect copies of passports (and applicable visas) prior to travel.

Notarized Parental Permission Forms

- All students must have this form signed by both parents or legal guardian(s) and notarized before they travel. Students must return these signed, notarized forms to the teacher with whom they are traveling. Keep the original copy of these forms, as you may need to present them at the airport during travel. You will also be required to send an electric copy to Xperitas.
- Many teachers choose to have a Notary Public present at the parent meeting to complete all forms.

Immunizations

- Encourage parents to visit <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel> for advice related to vaccines, traveling with chronic diseases, traveling with medicine, and more.
- Students can choose to schedule an appointment with a travel doctor. They will need to bring their program itinerary to the appointment.

Forms, Policies, and Pre-Departure Information

Xperitas will send these materials to you 2-3 months before departure. Set a meeting time with students and families to review this information and materials.

- Code of Conduct (completed via the Xperitas portal, but it never hurts to review in person!)
- Notarized Parental Permission Forms (refer to information above)
- Pre-departure booklet for students and leaders
- Instructions to view updated itinerary on your portal, with hotel and flight information
- Luggage tags: distribute two to each student
- Xperitas insurance cards to be printed for all students. Policy information can be found in the pre-departure booklet and via our website
- Emergency telephone chain: complete a copy for yourself and give copies to parents and Xperitas (unless you opt out)
- Determine parameters and a policy for technology use and review your plan for communication with parents during the program. For suggestions, refer to the Technology Use section of the *Travel Tips* section (page 12)

Student Meetings

Throughout the school year, we also suggest that you hold pre-departure meetings with your students to help prepare them for their immersion experience. It's best to set up a schedule of meetings as soon as your group has enrolled in the program. When possible, invite former Xperitas students to share their personal experiences. The purpose of these meetings is to:

- Get the leaders and students acquainted with each other
- Set a positive tone for the language commitment and program in general
- Equip students with tools to help them feel they can successfully use the language
- Help the students reflect on their personal goals for the experience
- Discuss expectations for the family stay, daily activities, language commitment, use of technology, curfews, etc.
- Prepare students for a successful family stay experience establish ground rules related to the Code of Conduct and any other rules set by leaders
- Address any questions students may have

At the end of each meeting students should be excited about their upcoming experiences, be willing to do their best to use the target language and be prepared to be good ambassadors of their school and their country.

Xperitas will provide you with resources you can use at these meetings. See the following page for descriptions of some of these activities.

RESOURCES

Online Educational Resources

You've chosen to travel with Xperitas (and we're so glad you did!), which means you are dedicated to providing your students with a profoundly educational and transformational experience. In accordance with our mission, we offer preparation materials in the form of both travel logistics, but more importantly, critical thinking activities. We know you are already conscious of how important pre-departure preparations are to a successful program, so we truly hope that you will take advantage of these activities located in the student handbook.

The activities are in English to facilitate their use for any language and destination. Students should use the target language as much as they can; challenge your students at their level. As cross-cultural issues are complicated, even in one's native language, allow for English use if it will help students understand issues and feelings before trying to figure out how to communicate with them in the target language.

Here is a list of the critical thinking activities we suggest you complete with your students in the next few months before departure:

CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Food is Cultural	Encourages students to think about culture as it relates to food
Understanding Your Comfort Zone	Have students reflect on their own lifestyle from an outside perspective and better understand what it will be like to be hosted by a family that might be very different than their own.
Adjusting to the Family Stay	Sets students up for success by adjusting their expectations so that they go into the experience with an open mind.
Call vs Don't Call	Gives students a better understanding of the expectations of the group leader during the family stay and empower them to understand and respond to their own emotions.
Connecting During the Family Stay	Share this resource with parents to help encourage them to distance themselves (and their kids) from technology and constant communication while the group is traveling.
The Importance of Self-Awareness	Makes students more aware of the traits that make them who they are and encourages them to consider how these traits may be the result of belonging to a certain culture.
Beat Boredom	Promotes keeping an open mind about boredom and gives suggestions on how boredom can be turned into something positive and productive so that students can make the most of their time abroad.
Family Stay "What If?"	Has students practice resolving various categories of problems that may arise while they are staying with their host family.
Likert Scale – Reflecting on a Continuum	This activity provides questions that will spark discussion about cultural difference and gets students to physically participate.
Guidelines for a Successful Family Stay	Instill confidence in your students before the family stay begins and remind them of respectful habits they should adopt to help them have a successful experience.
Expectations vs Reality	This resource helps students approach their program with an open mind and realistic expectations, ensuring they make the most of this transformative journey.

LEADER CHECKLIST

Congratulations on forming a group! Whether this is your first time or your 20th time as an Xperitas leader, there are many things to do between the fall and the end of your program to ensure success. The purpose of the following checklist is to help guide you through the experience from when your group is solidified in the fall to when you travel. These timelines may vary by destination. Do not hesitate to check with your Program Manager about any of the items listed here.

DONE	UPON FINAL ENROLLMENT
	Read the Leader Handbook (found on the Leader Resources landing page).
	Scheduled meetings with my students to prepare for our program abroad. <i>Refer to the Xperitas resources available in the Student Handbook via the Student Resources landing page (which can be found on the Xperitas portal).</i> I have also picked out the practical and critical thinking activities I will use.
	Verified that my students applied for or renewed their passports* and understand that they need to look into entry/exit requirements based on their passport nationality and destination of travel. <i>*Puerto Rico travelers do not need a passport. Identification is mandatory for all 18+ aged travelers to Puerto Rico.</i>
	Submitted my Family Stay Application (if planning to participate in the Xperitas-arranged family stay, rather than a hotel, during that portion of the program – Please check with your Program Manager if you are interested in staying with a host family to verify if it will be possible depending on destination and family stay community).
	Talked to my students about the importance of the family stay application and what a good family stay application should look like to ensure that they are prepared to submit the application by the November 1st deadline (for spring/summer programs). Your Program Manager will communicate the application deadline if travel is outside of these two seasons.

DONE	45-90 DAYS BEFORE DEPARTURE
	By the established deadline for my program (December 1 for spring/February 1 for summer), I have entered my passport* information on my Xperitas Portal and submitted a photocopy of the photo page. I have also reminded students to upload their information as well.
	Verified that all my students possess a passport that will be valid for at least 6 months past their return date. <i>(U.S. and Non-U.S. citizens may require visas/documentation; please verify with students that they have obtained any visas/documents needed for travel to your destination and back to the United States.)</i>
	Made photocopies of important travel documents (passports, visas, green cards, etc.) to take along with me.
	Reviewed Xperitas pre-departure email and documents sent by my Program Manager.
	Collected Notarized Parental Permission forms and submitted a copy to Xperitas before departure.
	Emphasized with families that the spelling of all names, genders and dates of birth submitted to Xperitas must be complete and match the participant's passport (students 18+ must travel with ID for Puerto Rico). This information will be used on the airline tickets and must match their passports exactly.
	Verified that all students have made their final payment.
	If I owe a pro-rata, I have made my payment to Xperitas.
	Reviewed all materials from the Xperitas Global Leaders Conference.
	Completed the emergency Telephone Chain form and submitted a copy to Xperitas or sent the corresponding form to opt out.
	Communicated with any "Indie" travelers and established when/where we will meet (if applicable).
	Provided Xperitas with contact information if I have requested to make my own arrangements during the family stay.

* Puerto Rico travelers do not need a passport but should still complete the passport section to confirm their full, legal name for airline ticket purposes. Identification is mandatory for all 18+ aged travelers to Puerto Rico. Anyone 18 or older must upload their intended form of identification for travel to Puerto Rico by the aforementioned passport deadlines.

DONE	30-45 DAYS BEFORE DEPARTURE
	Advised students/parents of flight expectations and dynamics.
	Scheduled a final parent meeting to go over any program instructions and distribute materials as needed.
	Given students clear instructions regarding how much money to take abroad and in what forms (ATM cards, credit cards, cash).
	Reviewed the information in the Family Stay section (starting on page 24) in this handbook.
	Made photocopies of the Xperitas forms I will use abroad (room assignment sheets, sign-out sheets, etc.).

DONE	LAST MONTH BEFORE DEPARTURE
	Received and reviewed for completeness and accuracy all group confirmation and e-ticket numbers within 24 hours of being notified they are available on your Xperitas final itinerary.
	Instructed my students to make special arrangements for their in-flight meal if applicable (e.g., gluten allergy, vegetarian, peanut allergy).
	Held a final meeting with students and parents during which I distributed and reviewed the Xperitas Pre-Departure Information and discussed expectations for the program.
	Shared with my students their host family information and encouraged them to be in touch with their family (if applicable).
	Reviewed final itineraries and flight information with my students.
	Filled out and returned the hotel rooming list to Xperitas if requested by your Program Manager.
	Checked our airline's website for luggage weight and size guidelines, as well as potential checked baggage fees, and informed students that they may check only one bag and take one carry-on.
	Reviewed the packing list with students including what to take and not to take in their luggage, especially in their carry-on bags, considering airport security rules. (tsa.gov)
	Given my students specific instructions concerning pre-flight check-in along with when and where to meet on departure day.
	Reviewed with students how to safeguard money and travel documents while abroad.
	Ensured students and leaders have their printed Xperitas insurance card and bring along a backup copy. Bring a sample claim form as reference if needed on program.
	Encouraged students to bring a thank you card to leave at their host family's home before departure.
	Verified that all students and leaders have their necessary travel documents (passports, visas, etc.)
	Applied and encouraged students to apply to STEP* via the instructions from the final itinerary e-mail from my Program Manager. *This is not an available service participants traveling to Puerto Rico, being a U.S. territory.

Program Planning Center

Please refer to your school's Enrollment and Pricing document for your corresponding payment and cancellation schedule, should it vary from our standard schedules and dates outlined below.

September/October

- Welcome back to school! Share program information for prospective students and families.
- Oct 1: Enrollment (\$500 deposit) due* for Spring participants to avoid a \$40 late enrollment fee.
- Oct 15: Enrollment (\$500 deposit) due* for Summer participants to avoid a \$40 late enrollment fee.
- Oct 15: Financial aid applications due.

** Those who enrolled by the Early Bird deadline do not need to submit an additional deposit by these dates.*

November

- Nov 1: Xperitas Family Stay Application due Nov 1 to avoid \$40 late fee.
- Nov 1: \$1,000 due for Spring participants to avoid \$40 late fee.
- Nov 15: \$1,250 due for Summer participants to avoid a \$40 late fee.
- Group List and medical information. Talk with your Program Manager regarding any concerns with students in light of information provided. **Check all passport names, birth dates, and genders** on the group list and email Xperitas any corrections at least 60 days prior to departure.

December

- Dec 1: \$1000 due for Spring participants.
- Dec 1: Spring Passport Submissions due to avoid a \$40 late submissions fee.
- Mid-Dec: Final Balances will be available for Spring participants on their Xperitas portal.

January

- Jan 15: \$1,250 due for Summer participants to avoid a \$40 late fee.
- Jan 15: Final Balance due for Spring participants to avoid a \$40 late fee. Leaders who have a leader pro-rata should also make their payment by this date.
- Jan 15: Spring itineraries are available on the Xperitas portal.
- Late January for spring participants: Complete and return the Hotel Rooming List sent by Xperitas if requested.

February

- ☐ Feb 1: Summer Passport Submissions due to avoid a \$40 late submission fee.
- ☐ Mid-Feb: Final Balances will be available for Summer participants on their Xperitas portal.
- ☐ Spring groups to receive from Xperitas (exact timing can vary based on destination and departure date):
 - ☐ Entry fee allowances and leader stipends.
 - ☐ Any pre-departure instructions or materials.*
 - ☐ Final itinerary with flight and eticket numbers (dependent on departure date).
 - ☐ Send completed telephone chain or opt out form to Xperitas.

** Some materials may be provided at the GLC if leaders attend.*

March

- ☐ Mar 15: Final balance due for Summer participants to avoid a \$40 late fee. Leaders who have a leader pro-rata should also make payment by this date.
- ☐ Mar 15: Summer itineraries are available on the Xperitas portal.

April

- ☐ Late April for summer participants: Complete and return the Hotel Rooming List sent by Xperitas if requested.
- ☐ Spring travelers: *Welcome back!* Complete post-program survey Xperitas sends via email. (Encourage participants and families to complete as well.)

May

- ☐ Summer groups to receive from Xperitas (exact timing can vary based on destination and departure date):
 - ☐ Entry fee allowances and leader stipends.
 - ☐ Any pre-departure instructions or materials.*
 - ☐ Final itinerary with flight and eticket numbers (dependent on departure date).
 - ☐ Send completed telephone chain or opt out form to Xperitas.

** Some materials may be provided at the GLC if leaders attend.*

July/August

- ☐ Summer travelers: *Welcome back!* Complete post-program survey Xperitas sends via email. (Encourage participants and families to complete as well.)



GROUND TRAVEL TIPS

Travel on Foot

General Guidelines

- No student should ever be allowed to walk around alone when touring a city, especially big cities. This includes busy subways, public buses, crowded areas, stores, etc.
- Create and enforce a buddy system, whereby three or more students are always looking out for one another.
- Students should always be able to reference their travel itinerary with detailed hotel information. During the family stay, they should carry their family's contact info with them.

Wear Appropriate Travel Clothing

- Refer to your country-specific packing list on the Xperitas Leader Resources landing page to best advise your students on appropriate clothing to wear while traveling abroad. Students also have the packing list available to them via their resource page.
- Ensure students wear comfortable walking shoes! Xperitas programs usually include a lot of walking, and inappropriate footwear (i.e. flip flops) can cause blisters or aching feet.

Be a Discreet Tourist

- While out and about in large cities, keep valuables hidden on your body or in a secure travel bag.
- Try not to call attention to yourself by talking more loudly than necessary, or opening large maps to their full size, or waving phones around in public.

Travel by Train

At the Station

- If your itinerary has trains as a form of transportation in-country, always be sure to double check the schedule the day before to confirm nothing has changed (i.e. time, cancellation, etc.). We advise checking once more before departing for the train station as sometimes changes can occur last minute.
- Arrive at least 45 minutes (some destinations 60 minutes is best; verify with your Program Manager) early depending on the size of the station (bigger stations can be confusing and security lines can be long during peak travel seasons).

Luggage

- Keep valuables with you on your lap.
- Use the overhead luggage racks or those on the end of the train car nearest to you if possible.
- Keep an eye on your luggage during train stops.

Disembarking

- Be prepared to disembark at least 15 minutes before your arrival, as trains may only stop for a minute or two.
- Have students put their things away and be ready to find and pick up their luggage as quickly as possible.
- Use multiple exits but stick together. If you have one or more co-leaders, have one leader wait at each exit.
- Remind students to take all their belongings.

Travel by Bus

Bus Company & Driver

You can find the name of your bus company or land operator and their contact information on your final itinerary.

- You may have different bus companies and/or drivers over the course of your itinerary.
- Drivers are responsible for the payment of any highway tolls, bridges, ferries or parking fees.
- Drivers' lodging/meals are not your responsibility, but drivers may appreciate an invitation to dine with the students and/or leaders.

Routing

- Drivers will know the basic route of each group; however, there is some leeway as to departure times, stops along the way, use of small roads instead of freeways and short detours to sites of interest. Please contact your Xperitas Program Manager to discuss the possibility of longer deviations or extended stopovers.
- Certain limits are placed on the driver by law and by the land operator, such as total driving time per day, a mandatory lunch break and a maximum number of discretionary extra kilometers and should be taken into consideration when calculating driving time and scheduling restroom breaks and meals.

Cooperation with the Driver (and Guide if it Applies to your Program)

- Involve the driver/guide and make them feel like a team member
- Have students help load and unload luggage and keep the bus clean.
- Help students practice good manners by saying, "hello," "goodbye" and "thank you" to the bus driver
- If your program has a guide, you will find they are a wonderful support and source of information for the program. That said, as the group leaders, you are still responsible for your students during travel. We ask that you partner with the guide as you travel and work to support them in their efforts or guidelines set for the group. We encourage you to work as a team with your guide!

Punctuality

- Be certain that students and all leaders always know the place and time for all bus departures.
- We recommend giving a departure time of 15 minutes before the time you must leave.

Eating En Route

- If you know that you will be on the road at lunchtime, ask the bus driver to stop at a place they know and recommends. You may have to call ahead to find out if a restaurant can accommodate a group of your size.

Tipping

- Tipping bus drivers/guides (if applicable) is a polite gesture and sometimes a major part of their income (especially in Latin America). Please verify with your Program Manager if tips are included for guides/drivers in your program, and refer to the country-specific materials shared in conjunction with the Global Leaders Conference to learn about common tipping practices for bus drivers/guides.

Bathroom Stops

- Remember to plan occasional bathroom stops on long trips, bearing in mind that good public restrooms may be hard to find.
- Be sure to bring packets of tissues in case toilet paper is not supplied.
- It may be necessary to pay to use restrooms, tip a restroom attendant and/or purchase a drink or snack to use restrooms in commercial establishments.
- In Latin America, remember to throw toilet paper in the trash can, not in the toilet. This also will apply during the family stay.

Bus Activity Ideas

Most buses have a microphone, which you can use to make announcements and point out interesting sights along the route. If you are not familiar with the area, your driver and/or guide may be a helpful source of information. Ask them to point out items of potential interest to you and the students.

This can also be useful for involving the students in language activities. One clever leader developed a “Radio Xperitas” activity with weather forecasts, news and funny anecdotes.

Here are some other bus activity ideas that we have collected:

- Busses may have a radio. Ask your driver if it is okay to play music to help pass the time on the bus and stay immersed in the language.
- Give a brief account of the history and sights before arriving in each city.
- Play language games! Example: “I am thinking of a city that begins with the letter B” ...
- Have students prepare jokes, stories, songs, awards, etc.
- Teach a new song each day. Create a playlist of songs in the target language as well as photocopied sheets of the lyrics.
- Post a map somewhere on the bus and keep the students informed of your location.
- Have students practice explaining their scrapbooks in the target language with a buddy in order to prepare for sharing with host families.
- Language lessons (10-15 minutes each day): A chance for the students to learn/practice new words, phrases and expressions, as well as review necessary words on a menu, on signs, in shops, etc.
- Have everyone share something that happened to them during the day or on the program so far.
- Ask students to share their observations and to think about their experiences so far. What similarities do they find to American culture? What differences have they observed or experienced?

Hotel Stays

Good behavior in hotels is extremely important and must be insisted upon. Groups need to be quiet and considerate of other hotel guests, keep rooms somewhat orderly, refrain from shouting in hallways or from balconies, avoid blocking access in hallways or the lobby, and avoid monopolizing the elevators. **There is to be no drinking or partying in hotel rooms.**

Check-In Procedure Tips & Recommendations

- Have students remain outside or on the bus instead of in the hotel lobby.
- One leader can go into the hotel to check-in, ask if rooms are ready and if so, distribute keys. Bring your own copy of the rooming list and note the room numbers of your students.
- Two or three students can help the driver unload luggage onto the sidewalk.
- The other leader can relay the time and place for breakfast and/or morning meeting.
- Send students up to their rooms via the stairs if elevator service is inefficient (be careful not to block traffic flow through the lobby).
- Explain to students:
 - The need to check their rooms for and report any damages
 - The need to leave keys at the desk whenever leaving the hotel
 - Acceptable hotel behavior (noise level both in hotel rooms and lobby areas)
 - The need to sign in and sign out the evening's curfew
 - Food and drinks cost extra in hotel rooms

Room Assignments

Your Xperitas Program Manager will give you your group's hotel room distribution before departure if your destination requires it. It may be that certain destinations do not require or do not provide distributions until the group arrives. If requested of you, please return rooming distributions to your Program Manager when requested in order to expedite the check-in process onsite.

Sign-Out/Sign-In Sheets

It is imperative to know where your students are at all times! The Xperitas sign-out/-in sheet will help with this (located on our [Traveling Teachers Resources](https://xperitas.org/traveling-teacher-resources) page (<https://xperitas.org/traveling-teacher-resources>)).

Curfew/Bed Checks

- Students going out without a leader should only do so in groups of at least three people, never alone! A reasonable curfew (by your definition) should be set each night and firmly enforced for all students.
- Check rooms to verify that the students are present and that there are no questions.
- It's always a good idea to monitor the halls and the hotel lobby for a while after the curfew. (This is a good time for leaders to review plans for the following day.)
- Ask the night clerk to let you know if any students attempt to leave the hotel.
- Some leader teams prepare a rotating schedule of late-night bed checks to share the responsibility.

Curfew/Bed Checks

- **Passport check!**
- Make sure that nothing is left in rooms and that rooms are left in good condition. Any damages caused by a student will be charged to that student and must be paid before leaving.
- Return all keys to the reception desk.
- Make sure there are no outstanding room charges. The hotel invoice will have been pre-paid by Xperitas. If the hotel asks you for money for anything other than incidentals, call Xperitas.

All hotel invoices have been pre-paid by Xperitas.

If a hotel asks for money, contact Xperitas.

Technology Use

Cell Phones

- Refer to your country-specific materials on the [Traveling Resources](#) page for Xperitas' recommendations regarding cell phones for leaders.
- We recommend you establish clear expectations and standards about calling and texting from abroad with both students and their parents.
- Travelers can also use hotel Wi-Fi to text or call via free apps such as WhatsApp or FaceTime, We Chat, Viber, etc.
- Xperitas recommends discouraging cell phone use for calling, texting or social media, but does not discourage the use of smart phones for taking photos or listening to music.
- Check with your cell provider for info on international plans and calling/data/texting rates.

Avoid promising parents a confirmation call or message upon arrival in the destination country, in case technology and/or weather issues do not allow for it.

Internet

- Many hotels have Wi-Fi or a public computer, but Internet connections are sometimes slower than in the U.S.
- Internet cafés are fairly widespread in some larger cities if you want to allow for group Internet time to Skype or email back home.

Social Media

Facebook and other social media platforms can be a useful way to stay connected and to share one's experience abroad, but they can also sabotage a student's opportunity to meet new friends or connect with host family members in the destination country. Homesick travelers are often tempted to stay plugged in to the world they know at home rather than embrace new people and experiences during their family stay abroad. For parents, too, constantly checking in on their globetrotting teens can seem like a great idea, but technology should never stand in the way of allowing students an authentic immersion experience.

Xperitas will support teachers in their decision to limit cell phones and social media use while abroad. Here are some ideas of ways to minimize your students' technology use:

- Have a discussion with students and parents about how detrimental Internet and social media can be to their experience and how it promotes rather than deters homesickness.
- Set a time limit on how much time students may spend online or set time for checking devices.
- Have a group blog or Facebook group and assign a different student each day to write a post about his or her own experience, so that parents are aware of what the group is doing.
- Remind students before the family stay that they should only use the host family's technology if they have permission. Some families might not have a Wi-Fi connection.

Dress

Dressing appropriately is as important as proper behavior and shows respect for others' cultural values. When it comes to clothing, U.S. Americans generally dress more informally than people in Xperitas destination countries. Students' apparel may be casual but should be clean and modest. Ragged and torn jeans, tank tops and short shorts are examples of clothing to be avoided. During the family stay, students should adjust to the level of formality/informality of their host families. Refer to your country-specific materials for more details about your group's destination.

Language & Motivation

Xperitas programs are designed to be a language immersion experience. An important aspect of the Xperitas experience is the commitment each teacher and student make to use the target language during the entire program. As part of the Xperitas Code of Conduct, students sign a pledge to speak the target language. One of the most challenging, but ultimately most rewarding tasks of an Xperitas leader is to encourage and enable each student to follow through on this pledge.

- Be a role model and use every opportunity to increase students' knowledge of the culture and their use of the target language.
- Reinforce your students' efforts with praise. Remind students that grammatical perfection is not necessary to communicate. Suggest practicing with native speakers with resources like Boomalang.
- Prepare your students with vocabulary practice for specific situations (ordering food at a restaurant, asking for directions, meeting your host family, etc.).
- Read the Looking Ahead emails that are sent to you before departure. These provide activities for students based on where they are in the preparation process.

Dining Out

Please refer to your itinerary to see which meals are noted, as this means they are included in the program. For other non-included meals, going out to eat is one of the greatest joys of travel and allows students the opportunity to interact with local people! Finding places to eat is easy if you observe the following:

- Take note of restaurants, cafeterias and other eating establishments you pass by during the day and keep a list of those that appeal to you.
- Go out to eat in small groups whenever possible.
- Clarify with the waiter how the bill is to be paid: by individual check or by one check per table.
- Ask people you meet for their suggestions, pointing out that you are interested in good food at modest prices.
- Check prices on menus posted outside to see if they are in your price range.

If you want the entire group to eat at the same restaurant, we recommend you make a reservation in advance.

Picnics

Organize picnics along the way! This is fun and very economical. Assign the purchase of certain foods to specific groups of students (bread, meat, cheese, fruit, beverages, etc.) during an outing to a market or grocery store and gather at a pre-determined place, such as a city park.

Holidays

You may find yourselves in a small town on a major holiday when very few restaurants are open. This will probably require you to make a group reservation in advance. Bus drivers and/or hotel personnel can be very helpful in making these arrangements.

Monetary Considerations

We recommend that you and your students use a combination of cash and cards while abroad. The following tips will help you and your students effectively manage their money while abroad.

Cash

Students should take at least \$100 in the foreign currency or US dollars with them. Foreign currency may be withdrawn from a bank/ATM upon arrival to the destination or at the international airport before departure. Please note that exchange rates are often higher in the U.S. and at the airport than at banks in your destination. You can also check with your hotel front desk, as many hotels exchange money at a good rate. If you are traveling on a guided program, your guide will advise you of the best place to exchange/take out money upon arrival.

Money

ATM, Debit & Credit Cards

Check with your card company prior to departure to alert them of your travel plans, ensure that your card will work in the destination country, and check for any applicable fees. For cards that require PINs, ensure your PIN is four numerical digits, as alphabet keys are almost nonexistent abroad.

Taking out money with an ATM or debit card is generally the cheapest and most convenient way to retrieve cash in the foreign currency. Your bank will most likely assess a fee for this convenience, and the ATM machine may do so as well. Be thoughtful about how much cash you withdraw each time to minimize individual withdrawal fees. Credit cards are usually accepted at restaurants, hotels and large department stores.

EMV or “chip cards” cards are commonly used in Europe and have recently become more common in the U.S. If you are traveling to Europe and your credit or debit card only has a magnetic strip on the back, you should check with your bank about procuring an EMV card. This could save you many hassles while traveling. Families may also wonder about the use of prepaid debit cards while traveling. While these seem like a great option and may work abroad, we still highly recommend that that students bring a regular debit or credit card as a backup in case the prepaid debit card doesn't work abroad.

Visiting a Bank/ATM

Banking hours vary from country to country, so if you need to use a bank while in your destination country, be sure to confirm banking hours when you arrive. Remind students to take along their passport for identification, it is best to schedule a time during the day to allow the students to take care of their money needs.

A good time is after breakfast at the beginning of the banking day. Advise your students to split up, avoiding a group run on a given bank or ATM. Students should always change enough money to cover needs for a holiday or weekend. If you are with a guide, ask your guide when and where to exchange money on the day of arrival.

Please review the country-specific materials you have access to for more tips and activities related to using money abroad!

For **European** destinations, Xperitas recommends the money and credit card tips from travel guru Rick Steves (ricksteves.com).

For **Latin American** destinations, Xperitas recommends the money and credit card tips from the Lonely Planet (lonelyplanet.com).

AIR TRAVEL

Air Travel Checklist

- ❑ Check your flights the day before departure to ensure they are still on time. Check the airline website using your name and airline confirmation number listed on the e-ticket. Give the airline your phone number and/or email address so they can contact you directly regarding any last-minute changes.
- ❑ Check the airline website for current baggage fees and policies as they relate to carry-on and checked luggage. Also, check to see whether meals and snacks are provided on your flight, and if there are any costs for these amenities. International rules and fees apply. Generally, there is no domestic bag fee if there is a direct connection to an international flight.
- ❑ Instruct everyone to arrive at the airport 3 hours prior to departure. You should arrive before the students and their parents so you can assist them as they arrive. For early morning departures, check the airline and/or airport website to see when the check-in counters open.
- ❑ Your group should be in line when the counter opens.
- ❑ Ask your airline if they have a group check-in desk. If there isn't one, ask the agent at your airline counter how they would like to handle the group check-in.
- ❑ Convey specific instructions to the students so they fully understand the airport process. Ensure all travelers' baggage is checked through to the final international destination.
- ❑ Confirm all students have proper documentation for airport check-in:
 - Passport that is valid for 6 months after your return date
 - Signed and Notarized Parental Permission Form (it is a good idea that leaders carry all copies on them in case the airline requests them)
 - Any visas or special documentation that may be required for U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens, both to enter destination and re-enter the U.S. For specific questions on required travel documents, please refer to the Required Documents page of this section
- ❑ Make sure all students have their Xperitas luggage tag filled out and attached to all checked and carry-on luggage. Encourage students to do this prior to arriving at the airport. These tags help participants, bus drivers, and Family Stay Coordinators identify you as an Xperitas group!
- ❑ If you or students would like to collect frequent flier miles, you may visit the airline's website, log into the reservation using your name and the flight confirmation number, and add your frequent flier number to the reservation. If the website does not allow you to, please contact Xperitas.
- ❑ Once you go through security together and find your gate, be certain the students know when and where to report for boarding. Remind them to keep boarding passes, checked luggage receipt, and passports in a secure place on their person, preferably in their money belt.
- ❑ For European travel (as applicable): the name of the bus company is on your final itinerary.

- ❑ All participants should be at the gate at least 60 minutes prior to departure, as the gate could change at the last minute, which could leave stragglers behind.
- ❑ If you have short connecting times in transit, instruct your students to use the bathroom on the plane before landing. There may not be enough time once you land and find your next gate.
- ❑ Your group will likely have pre-assigned seats. Specific seat requests are often not possible. Switching seats once your group is on the plane should be done quickly with discretion and should not impede other passengers or the flight crew. Xperitas recommends students sit in their assigned seats.
- ❑ Please ensure that your students behave well on the plane. Monitor their behavior and circulate regularly among them.
- ❑ If any students in your group do not have a seat assignment or boarding pass, one leader must remain with the student(s) until they are cleared to board the plane.
- ❑ Depending on the destination, the flight attendants will likely issue customs and immigration forms prior to arrival, which are to be completed and turned in. Be sure all your students fill these out properly.
- ❑ Before disembarking the plane: do a passport check! All participants should also check the seat pocket in front of them for anything they might have left there. Remind students to put their items in their money belt instead of in the seat pocket.
- ❑ Passports and other documents should always be available for periodic checks, especially prior to the group moving from one place to another. We suggest you tell students in advance that you will be conducting passport checks once or twice daily so they expect it.
- ❑ Upon arrival abroad, you will go through customs and immigration. Explain to the students that they will have to show their entry documents (passports and/or government ID for Puerto Rico, visas). One leader should be in front of the group and one at the rear while passing through customs. If there is only one leader, he/she should be at the rear, having designated one capable student to gather the group on the other side of customs prior to moving on to the baggage claim area.
- ❑ In some airports (such as in Latin America), passing customs involves going through a traffic-light lane. Passengers push a button, which illuminates a red or green light. A green light means the passenger is cleared to pass through; a red light means the passenger has been chosen by random selection to show suitcase contents. Explain this procedure ahead of time so that students are not alarmed.
- ❑ For European destinations, groups will go through immigration and customs in the first port of entry into the European Union, even if that's not the final destination.
- ❑ If your program includes a bus transfer, a leader should immediately go to the bus parking area and locate the bus driver and/or contact
- ❑ In our Spanish-speaking destinations, a contact person will be there to greet you as you depart the airport.

Required Travel Documents

COUNTRY	TRAVEL DOCUMENTS
Argentina Costa Rica Ecuador France Germany Peru Spain Switzerland	<p>U.S. Passport Required. U.S. Passport required. Xperitas requires that your passport be valid 6 months past date of scheduled return. Refer to the State Department website for specific country requirements: https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country.html. Review if there are any necessary visas or documents for travel, (e.g. ESTA, green card, etc.) based on passport nationality and destination of travel.</p> <p>Notarized parental permission form signed by both parents or legal guardian(s) for all students under age 18 traveling abroad without a parent. There is also a form available for students who are 18 or older.</p>
Puerto Rico	<p>Notarized parental permission form signed by both parents or legal guardian(s) for all students under age 18 traveling abroad without a parent. There is also a form available for students who are 18 or older. Identification is mandatory for all 18+ aged travelers to Puerto Rico.</p>

Please note that specific requirements are subject to change.

There are **additional requirements for non-U.S. citizens** that may include visas for entry into some countries and documents for reentry into the U.S. **It is the responsibility of individual participants to secure the appropriate travel documents.** Xperitas does not accept responsibility for any situation or costs arising from missing or improper documents.

Carry-On Packing List

In case your group's luggage is lost en route to your destination or you are stranded at the airport due to flight delays, it is important for you and your students to have the following essentials with you in your carry-on bag. While we hope these situations don't happen, it's important to be prepared and maintain a positive attitude and sense of humor.

- ☐ Basic toiletry items: toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, tissues, contact solution and case or glasses case (if applicable).
- ☐ Over-the-counter pain medication or sleep aid; any prescription drugs taken daily.
- ☐ Comfortable clothing that can double as pajamas.
- ☐ Extra underwear.
- ☐ A pair of socks.
- ☐ Eye mask and ear plugs to help you sleep.
- ☐ Snacks and an empty water bottle.
- ☐ Games, books and playing cards to help you pass time.
- ☐ Small electronics with a charged battery (such as a cell phone, airpods, ipod, camera), along with corresponding chargers.
- ☐ A journal and pen to record your adventure.

For country-specific information on what to pack in your checked luggage, refer to our country-specific handbooks and packing lists available on our Student and Traveling Teacher Resource Pages.

Airline Changes

We know it happens all the time, but we hope it won't happen to us! Delayed or canceled flights, missed connections, and overbooked flights are a reality for all airline travelers. Airlines have reduced the number of flights offered and are using smaller planes booked to capacity, all of which makes it more difficult to accommodate passengers on alternate flights. In the event that a flight delay or cancellation happens to you, we hope the following information will help you handle the situation.

What happens if my original flight is canceled or delayed?

The airline has sole control for re-booking your group (Xperitas cannot re-book, but it is important to keep us informed). The airline agent at the check-in counter or at the gate is your best help! They have the most power to access your records and make any changes. The airline is obligated to re-book you on the next available flight (the flight that has enough open seats), which may not be on the same day, the same airline, or have the same routing as your original flight.

If you find yourself waiting in a long line to speak with an airline agent at the airport, we suggest that you view your reservation online because the airline may have already rebooked your group.

You can also call Xperitas to see if there is anything that can be done in the meantime to help move the process along.

The airline might divide a larger group into several into several smaller groups. This is okay as long as there is always a leader with each group. No one should ever fly alone! Always keep Xperitas and parents informed.

What about the extra costs or missed travel components due to flight delays?

Delays are an inherent risk of travel and the related causes are not the fault of the group leader, the school or Xperitas. In some instances, the airlines may cover hotel and meal costs during the delay, but they will not reimburse passengers for missed tour components such as hotel nights, tours, and train reservations. Xperitas will attempt to negotiate a refund of missed tour components from the vendors or try to reschedule them. We are not able to reimburse travelers for any non-refundable expenses. **The group leader, school and Xperitas are not obligated to pay for any additional costs such as hotels, meals and transportation incurred by the flight delay.** Emphasize to parents that these expenses are out of our control and that they are responsible for these costs. Xperitas or the group leader may temporarily cover an expense to expedite the process with the understanding that the parents will reimburse Xperitas or the group leader.

What is the airline's obligation if there is a delay or cancellation?

The reason for the delay or cancellation is very important. If the airline is at fault (mechanical, personnel, etc.) they should provide the following:

- Re-booking on the next flight with available seats.
- Possibly re-booking you with another airline.
- Hotel accommodation and meal vouchers.
- Ground transportation if necessary.
- If the airline is not at fault (weather, air traffic control, Homeland Security, etc.) they must provide:
 - Re-booking on the next flight with available seats.
 - Airlines have no other obligation but may at their discretion provide meal vouchers and/or pillows and blankets if the group is stranded in the airport overnight. If your group prefers to pay for their own hotel accommodations during the delay, ask the airline agent for a list of hotels that offer discounted "distressed traveler" rates.

What do I do if my group has to spend the night in the airport?

- Make sure everyone has confirmed seat assignments for the new flight arrangements.
- Call the Xperitas emergency cell phone with an update (612-643-1473).
- Once your situation is confirmed, inform parents.
- Report for check-in early. We recommend 3 hours before departure.
- For a helpful guide to your passenger rights and airline policies regarding flight changes, visit <https://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/fly-rights>.

Lost or Delayed Luggage

If luggage does not arrive at your final destination, you must file a report with the airline at the airport. Most airlines have a luggage claim desk or office in the airport luggage claim area. You must show the luggage claim check receipt(s) which are usually attached to the boarding pass. You will receive a reference number for the lost baggage claim and instructions on how to follow-up with your claim. Be sure to ask the airline about their expense reimbursement policy. Most airlines will reimburse passengers for any reasonable costs if they need to purchase basic toiletries and clothing until their luggage is recovered. Details can be found on most airline websites. Be sure to keep detailed receipts to file a claim for expenses with the airline when you get home.

Helpful Hints

- Make sure the agent understands that your group consists of minors and must stay together with the assigned leader.
- If there is a long line to speak to an airline agent at the airport, you may wish to check your reservation online while in line or call the airline to find out if alternate flights have already been confirmed. If they have, move your group to the appropriate departure gate as soon as possible.
- If no space is available on your airline, ask about possibility of changing to another airline in order to move the group as soon as possible. Please note that most group fare tickets cannot be transferred to another airline.
- Stay positive! Students will take their cue from you.
- Make sure that everyone in your group has a seat assignment and boarding pass before you get on the plane. An adult should wait at the gate with any student with a pending seat assignment or boarding pass. Once you board the plane, the airline may not allow you to deplane due to security issues.
- If you are a large group, it may be necessary to split your group into two or more smaller groups, so the group can be re-booked as quickly as possible. Make sure you have one adult with each sub-group. If you are the only leader, do not separate from the students.
- Write down any changes and confirm them with the agent. Be sure to get airline names, flight numbers, departure and arrival cities, and flight times. If the group is split up, verify who is on each flight. Explain to your students exactly what the changes are. Call Xperitas at 1-800-892-0022 or the emergency cell phone (if after 4:30 p.m. CST or during the weekend) at 612-643-1473 to update us. Xperitas can then activate your telephone chain and advise the land operator and bus company if necessary. For this reason, it is important to send Xperitas your telephone chain before your departure.
- Parents often call Xperitas when flight changes occur, and unless the group leader keeps us informed, it may be difficult for Xperitas to obtain information on the group's status from the airline. Please update Xperitas regarding any changes in your flights so we can communicate the most accurate information to the parents. Remind your students not to call their parents with partial information before concrete changes have been confirmed. It is best if the leader reports confirmed arrangements using the telephone chain.
- If you bring your cell phone keep it in your carry-on. Remember to bring your charger as well, in case you need your phone for the situations listed above.

THE FAMILY STAY EXPERIENCE®

Xperitas believes that living with a host family, speaking their language and participating in their customs is the best, most authentic and rewarding way to experience another culture. It's also what distinguishes our programs from any other individual, family or group travel experience.

After more than 50 years of arranging family stays, we are no longer surprised when students consistently report that living with a family is the best part of their experience abroad. Our success with family stays is contributed to our network of thousands of dedicated, gracious people around the world who work tirelessly to ensure a wonderful experience for our students.

How Host Families are Chosen

This is a frequently asked question and one that we take very seriously. Understandably, parents of Xperitas students want to be assured that care and consideration are given to the process of finding suitable host families.

In each community where families host our students, Xperitas has a family stay coordinator. This person is often a teacher or someone else in the community who has access to local schools and parent-teacher organizations through which he or she establishes contact and announces the opportunity to host a U.S. teenager. In the great majority of cases our coordinators have been doing this work for many years.

It is significant to note that our host families are not financially motivated but rather have a genuine desire to welcome a student in their home and participate in this cultural exchange. Host families receive a small stipend to help offset some expenses for meals. This is an important distinction from typical room-and-board arrangements whereby some companies hire and pay families. Since our host families are not paid, their primary incentive is a genuine desire to host a U.S. student and to share an enriching cross-cultural experience.

Families who host must complete an application form in which they provide references and information about themselves. The family stay coordinator reviews each application, decides on the suitability of each family and ensures that sleeping arrangements are appropriate and accommodations are in line with Xperitas standards.

The main criteria for families to host an Xperitas student are that the family has the means to host (the student should be provided meals and have his or her own bed and own room if gender is different from host sibling) and a strong interest in hosting. They are expected to provide a safe and caring environment for the duration of the stay. If the host family does not have a teenager, contact with teenage peers may naturally occur through neighbors, relatives, or friends of the family. It is important to remember that interaction need not be peer-to-peer to create a meaningful bond.

The U.S. student is to be treated as a member of the family, subject to the normal rules of the household. To allow for maximum opportunity to become integrated into the everyday life of the host family, families are not expected to arrange special excursions, and group activities with the other American students are not encouraged during the family stay. The U.S. student is expected to adapt to the family and its daily routine.

Every family is unique, and every family stay situation is different. The only expectation should be that the U.S. student will be immersed in the everyday life of a local family. It is important to consider that a typical family can take many forms, such as a traditional nuclear family, a single parent home, empty nesters, etc. Attending school may be an option but can't be guaranteed. In the unlikely event that there is cause to move the student to a different host family, it is the student's responsibility to contact the group leader so that an appropriate remedy can be found.

If this should occur, the local coordinator will be involved in and will lead the process. The group leader will be made aware and the student's parents notified. As always, the safety and welfare of our students is our top priority.

There is an expectation that the host family will comply with the norms of the program. At the same time, there is an expectation that the student will do his/her part to make the homestay a success by practicing daily courtesies, demonstrating interest in things new and different, engaging in conversation, not retreating to the privacy of his/her room, and not unfairly comparing the host family with his/her family back home or with friends' host families.

Once available, we will communicate to the group leader the following information about the host families: name, address, email (when available), telephone and/or cell phone number, all family members and their respective ages/genders, if any, and their respective ages. In some cases, the host family may reach out to the U.S. student first, but it is perfectly acceptable for the U.S. student to make the first contact. If a response is not received within a week or two, please contact us so that we can verify the family's contact information.

While no one can offer absolute guarantees about an experience as personal and subjective as this one, we have the utmost confidence in our family stay coordinators. We rely on the goodwill of everyone involved and on their honest, full disclosure when filling out Host Family and Family Stay Applications. The overwhelming majority of our students continue to rate their family stays very positively and many say it was the best, most rewarding part of the program.

FAQs about the Family Stay

When do teachers receive family stay placement information?

Because our host families are volunteers, the timing of when Xperitas and teachers receive information about host families varies.

Your family stay information will be relayed to you as soon as we have it available, which often is shortly before departure. In some cases, it could be two weeks beforehand, in other cases the day before departure. Please know we always work hard on securing the best possible family stay placements. We know you're anxious to get this information and we'll pass it on as soon as we get it! As soon as your family stay community has been determined, your Program Manager will inform you and provide a Family Stay Community Sheet with general information about your host community.

How do I best prepare my students for the family stay experience?

Xperitas has many helpful documents for leaders to prepare their students for this exciting part of their program. Leaders should familiarize themselves with the resources available, some of which were highlighted previously in this handbook.

Xperitas recommends devoting an entire preparation meeting with your students to the family stay. Role-playing the different situations that may arise in the family stay, and how the students would handle them is highly recommended. Speaking openly and honestly with your students about your expectations and the consequences of not adhering to the Xperitas Code of Conduct has proven to be very effective in preventing issues from arising during the family stay.

Does Xperitas have any ideas for good gifts for students to give their host family?

Gifts given to the host family do not need to be expensive or extravagant. Think about what would be unique and meaningful. Some ideas include:

- Something that comes from or is made in your town, city or region
- Preserved food items from your region that you can cook with your host family
- Clothing or souvenirs featuring sports teams from your school, city or state
- A book or calendar about your town or state with lots of pictures
- A personal photo album with photos that depict your life in the U.S.
- Pictures of your family, school, pets and things that you do are best
- Games that can be played with your host family

Should leaders reach out to students during the family stay?

While we advise that activities not be arranged during the family stay to maximize the immersion experience, it is a good idea to check in with your students and host families after the second night to make sure that everyone is adapting well. Remind students that they should call you or the Family Stay Coordinator if there is a problem.

As a leader, am I required to be on-call throughout the family stay portion of the trip?

Xperitas requires at least one leader to remain on call during the family stay. Being on call does not mean that you must stay near a telephone all day and night. However, a student's call requires your response. Xperitas suggests that you give the students a standard time when you will be available for calls (8-10 a.m.? 6-8 p.m.?). Advise your students that they may leave a message for you at the telephone number you give them. At least one leader needs to have international phone service during the program. The students will be able to call the Family Stay Coordinator at all times during the family stay.

If you are staying at a local hotel, we suggest you alert the hotel desk to let them know that you might receive telephone messages.

When traveling with multiple leaders, setting up an on-call schedule throughout the family stay can be helpful. The on-call schedule can be determined in collaboration with your co-leaders, usually at the Global Leaders Conference. Leaders must accompany their students to the family stay community for the start of the family stay. Likewise, leaders are expected to be present in the community or a nearby hotel for the last night of the family stay to prepare for the group's departure.

Can a leader be completely independent throughout the family stay?

Leaders do have the option of being on their own during most of the family stay, provided that the group of leaders are in agreement regarding the on-call schedule. If you choose to be independent and leave the family stay community during this time, you are responsible for your own transportation and lodging. Please leave a contact number with Xperitas, your co-leaders and the Family Stay Coordinator where you can be reached in case they need you during your absence.

If you are traveling and don't have a fixed number to leave, Xperitas suggests calling in regularly to let your co-leaders know where you can be reached in case of an emergency. In the event of an emergency, it is your duty to return to assist your students. Leaders traveling alone (without a co-leader) are not permitted to travel independently during the family stay.

Whose responsibility is it to communicate with the host family community about the group's arrival and departure?

Arrival and departure information will be communicated by your Xperitas Program Manager, or your local guide. They will be in communication with the Family Stay Coordinator and the bus driver, if your group travels by bus to the community. It is essential that you arrive on time so as not to keep the families waiting. Should you have an emergency and fall behind schedule, it is the leader's responsibility to call the Family Stay Coordinator to alert them of the delay and your new estimated time of arrival.

Does Xperitas have any last-minute tips prior to entering the family stay?

Speaking with your students en route to the family stay community can be very helpful. Most students will be somewhat quiet and apprehensive. Assure them that this is absolutely normal. Give students a review orientation about the family stay and reiterate the importance of reasonable expectations. Remind them of the importance of a good first impression and the power of a smile. Xperitas also suggests reviewing the protocol regarding emergency situations. Make sure each student has the telephone numbers to reach you and the Family Stay Coordinator and instruct them to call if there is a problem. This review and “pep talk” session encourages the students to relax and helps ensure a great start to the family stay experience.

What is the best way to meet the Family Stay Coordinator and assemble the host families upon arrival?

When Arriving By Bus

Leaders should ask their students to wait on the bus while they get off to meet the Family Stay Coordinator and families. Find the Family Stay Coordinator and introduce yourself. Please communicate your contact information and any last-minute logistical information such as departure time, personal travel plans, etc. Find out from him/ her what expectations they have of you during the family stay and if they have made any plans involving you.

If possible, try to address the group of families as a whole and convey your thanks for their generosity and kindness. Remind the families to speak the target language with your students and to be especially patient the first couple days. Then welcome the Family Stay Coordinator onto the bus to meet your students, making sure they know his/her name and understand his/her role.

In front of the students, thank the Family Stay Coordinator for the tremendous work that has been done to find the host families. Make it known that in conjunction with the Family Stay Coordinator, one of the leaders will be available to assist in the event of any problem.

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When Arriving By Train

Prepare your students before exiting the train about what you expect of them once you arrive at the train station. If possible, find a quiet space off to the side for the students to wait with their luggage while the leaders meet with the Family Stay Coordinator as mentioned above. The Family Stay Coordinator, with help from group leaders, will pair each student with their host family.

Regardless of the mode of arrival, ensure that thanks are given to the appropriate people and that everyone is aware of the emergency contact information.

What should students do in case of problems during the family stay?

Students should have the group leader and Family Stay Coordinator's contact information in case an emergency arises. Students should feel comfortable reaching out to their leader, and families to the Family Stay Coordinator.

If a problem arises with a student or family, Xperitas encourages leaders to keep the following in mind: There are always two sides to consider. Try to remain non-judgmental, and always involve the local Family Stay Coordinator in any decisions regarding the families. Never move a student yourself unless there is an apparent emergency and you cannot locate the Family Stay Coordinator. Please notify Xperitas staff via the emergency phone of any family changes.

Post Family Stay

We recommend that you and your students discuss the family stay experience once you are reunited as a group. This is an excellent way to put the whole experience into perspective. If any students have complaints, encourage them to focus on the positive aspects of their experience. Some students will have no complaints whatsoever until comparisons are made with friends whose host families were more active, planned more activities or lived in bigger homes. Point out that each family is unique and that comparing one to another is unfair. Discuss what was learned during the family stay experience.

How should the students thank their families for hosting them?

Xperitas recommends that each student write a thank you note. Explain that a letter of thanks is expected regardless of how the experience was for the student – just as one would expect a thank-you note for a birthday present or wedding gift even if the gift wasn't exactly what one wanted.

Students should prepare thank-you notes **before** the last day of the family stay and leave them with their host family. Thank-you notes are extremely helpful for the success of Xperitas programs, which is why we ask leaders to help facilitate this process with their students before returning home. Host families very generously volunteer their time and open their homes to students and can feel very hurt if their students don't write.

INSURANCE, HEALTH & SAFETY

Health & Safety

Participants must disclose any health conditions, medications, medically verified allergies, or dietary restrictions of which Xperitas, the program leader, and/or the host community or host family should be made aware. This includes mental, emotional, and/or social health concerns. We always rely on students and families to share this information with us so we can in turn evaluate if participants are able to successfully participate in our language immersion programming.

As part of our process, participants' health and dietary information is shared proactively with our in-country partner and/or Family Stay Coordinator. **It is not shared with the airlines, so participants need to proactively share any allergies or requests directly with the airline.**

Participants should travel with any necessary medication and know how to use it effectively. A medical professional will not be traveling with groups. Additionally, students need to advocate for their own well-being. This includes asking questions and recommunicating their allergies or dietary restrictions clearly to the guide (if applicable), host family, and food service providers.

Insurance

All Xperitas program participants* have medical coverage included, subject to certain exclusions, for accidents and illness while on their program. Xperitas participants will receive their insurance card prior to departure and should carry it with them while traveling. Additional insurance benefits and/or higher limits may also be purchased.

Xperitas also provides trip cancellation insurance due to medical reasons. Xperitas does not offer cancel-for-any-reason insurance. All travelers who would like trip cancellation insurance for non-medical reasons are encouraged to purchase additional travel insurance independently.

More information about our medical and trip cancellation insurance can be found here: <https://xperitas.org/resources/medical-insurance>.

*Inbound program participants coming to the USA are subject to different coverage limits, and upgrades are not available for purchase. Please talk to your Program Manager for more details specific to the insurance policy for programs coming to the USA.

Health & Safety at a Glance

- Medical coverage is provided for accidents and illness while on the program, up to \$50,000
- Trip cancellation coverage up to \$1,000 (due to medical reasons only)
- Emergency medical evacuation per doctor orders or natural disaster/political instability involving the program location
- Liability insurance for group leaders
- Adherence to health and safety guidelines from recognized health and government authorities domestically and abroad
- Participants can register themselves with STEP, the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. Your Program Manager will send instructions on how to do so shortly before departure.
- Pre-travel resources to prepare students for a safe travel experience
- Communication with a dedicated Xperitas Program Manager from planning to post-program
- In-country support with trusted local partners and Family Stay Coordinators
- 24-7 emergency support from Xperitas

Accessing Medical Care while Abroad

Please remind participants that traveling abroad may pose unique challenges for managing health conditions and accessing medical care. It is crucial for participants to carry any prescription medications in their original containers on their person, especially in case of emergencies. For those with allergies or medical conditions that require immediate attention, such as carrying an epi-pen, it is essential to have these items readily accessible at all times.

Participants should also be aware that medical care abroad often requires payment upfront. This means they will likely need to cover the cost of any medical services or prescriptions themselves at the time of treatment. After returning home, participants can then submit a claim for reimbursement through their insurance. Xperitas is happy to provide this form for anyone who needs it. It is important to remind participants to keep track of and hold onto all medical receipts and documentation, as these will be necessary when filing a claim.

It is important to note that in some destinations, pharmacies and medical offices may be closed on weekends, so planning ahead is crucial whenever possible.

For detailed and up-to-date insurance coverage information, please refer to the [Xperitas insurance page](https://xperitas.org/resources/medical-insurance) (<https://xperitas.org/resources/medical-insurance>) and review the FAQs available.

If there are questions about the Core insurance policies, including additional coverage options, payments, or claims, families can also contact Core Travel at administrator@coretravelinsurance.com or 518-708-4192.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

Xperitas Contact Information

Xperitas office hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (CST)

Xperitas Office Toll-free **1-800-892-0022** (in the U.S. only)

Xperitas Emergency Cell Phone* **612-643-1473** (after hours)

**Please explain to students and parents that this number should only be used in emergencies.*

For Information Regarding Insurance Coverage & Upgrades

Core™ Travel Administrator

<https://www.coretravelinsurance.com/>

administrator@coretravelinsurance.com

Xperitas Program Managers

Argentina, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Spain	Lucia Cervera Vazquez	612-436-8280
Ecuador, Peru	Monika Estrada	612-436-8264
France, Switzerland, Italy	Matthew Lily	612-436-8263
Germany	Hanna Edwards	612-436-8268
	Monika Estrada	612-436-8264
All Programs	Emma Rojas, Director of Programs	612-436-8297
	Jenny Behrens, Director of Operations	612-436-8267

While abroad, please consult your final itinerary for any country-specific emergency phone numbers.

Medical Assistance

Provider:

Zurich American Insurance Company

Policy GPT-4851233

24-Hour Emergency Medical Assistance:

For all Xperitas participants and leaders

+1-800-263-0261 When calling inside the U.S. or Canada

+1-416-977-0277 When calling outside the U.S.

Please note, you will need the full name and date of birth of the person who needs medical care.

U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATE LOCATIONS

COUNTRY	CITY	PHONE	ADDRESS
Argentina	Buenos Aires	+54-(11) 5777-4533	U.S. Embassy Ave. Colombia 4300 Buenos Aires
Costa Rica	San Jose	(506) 2519-2000 (In-Country)	U.S. Embassy Calle 98 Via 104, Pavas, San José
Ecuador	Quito	02-398-5000 (From other Ecuadorian Provinces) 593-2-398-5000 (From abroad) 398-5000 (From Quito and other cities within the province)	U.S. Embassy E12-170 Ave. Avigiras y Ave. Eloy Alfaro, Quito
France	Bordeaux	+33 (0)1 43 12 22 22 usabordeaux@state.gov	U.S. Consulate 89 Quai des Chartrons, 33300 Bordeaux
	Lyon	+33 (0)1 43 12 48 60 usalyon@state.gov	U.S. Consulate Espace Cordeliers 2, rue du Président Carnot, 69002 Lyon
	Paris	+33 (0)1 43 12 22 22	U.S. Embassy 2 avenue Gabriel, 75008 Paris
	Marseille	+33 (0)1 43 12 22 22	U.S. Consulate Place Varian Fry, 13006 Marseille
	Rennes	+33 (0)1 43 12 22 22 usarennes@state.gov	U.S. Consulate 30, quai Duguay-Trouin, 35000 Rennes
	Strasbourg	+33 (0)1 43 12 22 22	U.S. Consulate 15, avenue d'Alsace, 67082 Strasbourg
Germany	Berlin	+49 (30) 8305-0 (Emergency and non-emergencies)	U.S. Consulate Clayallee 170, 14191 Berlin
	Frankfurt	+49 (69) 7535-0	U.S. Consulate Giessener Str. 30, 60435 Frankfurt am Main
	München	+49 (89) 2888-0	U.S. Consulate Königinstraße 5, 80539 München

COUNTRY	CITY	PHONE	ADDRESS
Italy	Florance	+39 055.266.951	U.S. Consulate Lungarno Vespucci, 38 50123 Firenze Roma
	Milan	+39 02.290351	U.S. Consulate via Principe Amedeo, 2/10 20121 MILANO
	Naples	+39 081.583.8111	U.S. Consulate Piazza della Repubblica 80122 NAPOLI
	Rome	+39 06.46741	U.S. Embassy via Vittorio Veneto 121, 00187 Roma
Perú	Lima	(+51) 1 618-2000	U.S. Embassy Avenida La Encalada cdra. 17 s/n Surco, Lima 33, Peru
Puerto Rico*	San Juan Passport Agency	(+1) 877-487-2778	Centro Gubernamental Minillas Torre Norte, Piso 9 Avenida Jose de Diego, Parada 22 San Juan, 00940, Puerto Rico
	Department of State- Puerto Rico	(+1) 787-722-2121	C. San José, San Juan, 00901, Puerto Rico
Switzerland	Bern	031 357 70 11	U.S. Embassy Sulgeneckstrasse 19, CH-3007 Bern

** Puerto Rico does not have an embassy since it is a territory of the U.S. The offices above offer support from the local Puerto Rican government.*

Note: Each of the above numbers is subject to change without Xperitas' knowledge.

Replacing a Passport or Other Important Documents

Passport Loss

Students should guard their passports with the same care as they guard their money. The loss or theft of a passport is **extremely serious**. Passport replacement is expensive and quite time-consuming. Most passports are lost because of inattentiveness or failure to follow simple security measures (such as carrying the passport in a neck pouch or money belt).

Replacement of Passport

The loss or theft of a passport must be reported immediately to the police and the nearest American Embassy or Consulate. The following may be needed to replace a passport:

- Two official passport photos, U.S. regulation size
- Replacement fee in cash
- Proof of citizenship
- Number of the lost passport with the date and place of issue
- Police report
- Proof of imminent travel plans

Having a digital or photocopy of the original passport is highly recommended!

Every Xperitas traveler should enroll themselves in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a service of the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. This program provides travelers with important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in the destination country and helps the U.S. Embassy contact travelers in an emergency. If a student loses his or her passport, it could be helpful to mention that the traveler is enrolled in this program.

United States Embassies & Consulates

Dependent upon your destination, there will be one or more locations for U.S. State Department installations abroad. You may have to travel to the capital city to wait in the emergency passport line, as not all locations process replacement passports. You will need to determine which agencies in your destination country provide this service. To find the most current information on embassies and consulates around the world, see: www.usembassy.gov.

POST-TRAVEL

Post-Travel Checklist

You've returned from your adventures abroad – now what? Below is a helpful checklist of things to take care of post-travel. We hope that you've returned with wonderful memories and success stories and we can't wait to hear all about your trip!

- ❑ **Thank you notes** - Make sure all your students have written their host families thank you notes. More information about the best way to thank host families can be found in the Family Stay tab of this handbook.
- ❑ **Complete the Xperitas online program evaluation survey** - An invitation to evaluate your program will be emailed to you and to students and parents upon your return. Your feedback helps us improve our communication with Family Stay Coordinators, hotels, bus companies and other partners, and allows us to improve the overall program experience. We look forward to learning more about your program and by sharing your thoughts with us you play an instrumental role in improving future programs. Xperitas will provide a summary of your group's responses upon your request.
- ❑ Please remind students to complete the evaluation!
- ❑ Inform your students about the different Xperitas awards and contests – Xperitas has several different awards and opportunities for students to stay involved in their experience abroad, like our Photo/Video contest.
- ❑ **Submit stories to the Xperitas Blog** – The blog is a great place for students to share their experiences with other travelers. Visit xperitas.org/blog.
- ❑ **Refer your colleagues to Xperitas!** In appreciation of teachers who refer their colleagues to Xperitas, a \$1,000 Referral Reward is provided to a teacher when someone they have referred travels for the first time on an Xperitas program with six or more students. Xperitas also offers a World Language Department Grant. This grant is automatically provided to World Language departments in which two (\$500), three (\$750), or four (\$1,000) language programs in the same school travel with six or more students on an Xperitas program in the same or alternate years.

We encourage you to be in direct contact with your students to submit photos, stories or videos. More information can be found on xperitas.org.

Resources

The following resources will be available to you throughout the planning and travel process or is available on our Traveling Resources page: <https://xperitas.org/traveling-teacher-resources>. Please see instructions below for each form.

DONE	30-45 DAYS BEFORE DEPARTURE
Xperitas Code of Conduct	Each student has signed a digital copy via their Xperitas portal. Idea: complete again in person at a parent meeting and bring copies during travel for a strong reminder if needed.
Notarized Parental Permission Forms	Signed by both parents or legal guardian(s) for all students under age 18 traveling abroad without a parent. There is also a form available for students who are 18 or older. Bring originals with you during travel and submit a copy to Xperitas.
Telephone Chain	Complete before travel and distribute to parents or complete a phone tree waiver. Keep a copy on hand during travel and return on to your Xperitas Program Manager.
Leader Expense Report	Use during travel to track your expenses.
Hotel Sign In/Out	Use during travel to monitor students.
Core Travel Insurance Claim Form	Reach out to Xperitas for the most up-to-date claim form.
Incident Report Form	Use to record any serious medical incidents that arise during your program abroad.
Incident Log	Use to keep a log of all medical, behavioral and/or logistical issues during your program abroad. It will help you to remember to address a problem, keep a record of unresolved issues and/or share concerns with Xperitas.

*Muchas Gracias, Merci Beaucoup,
Grazie, Vielen Dank*

*Thank you for your time, your commitment
to your students & language learning,
and for choosing Xperitas!*