



## **Sustainability and Study Abroad Pre-Departures - SUNY Best Practice Guide**

SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee

*Your actions make a difference! We are educating students to take practical steps to a more sustainable experience. Equally important, we are educating students not only for their study abroad experiences, but for the remainder of their lives. The little actions they take now can help to make big changes in the future.*

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## **Introduction:**

The goal of this guide is to provide a starting point for SUNY CIE staff to implement sustainability practices into their pre-departure resources for study abroad students. The information focuses primarily on the educational aspects of pre-departure rather than the logistical aspects. We have organized the information to be sorted first by topic. Please know that this is not the only way to organize this information, that many of the topics can and will overlap, and that campuses are encouraged to reformat the information as they see fit. In the final section, we organize the information into an appendix of resources so that you won't have to recreate the wheel. Some of these resources come directly from the SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee, while others were offered as free resources from a variety of sources (NAFSA, Forum on Education Abroad, etc.).

*Disclaimer:* Please note that this guide is meant merely as a starting point and shouldn't be viewed as a finalized identification of sustainability practices for pre-departures. This document is a living document both in that practices and ideas are constantly evolving, but also in that the expertise of the SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee is forever changing too. We hope you enjoy it!

## **Initial Thoughts**

It's Important to Travel! International education is an essential component to the future of sustainable development. Our understanding of the world, cultures, and global issues is paramount to our success in fighting the issues of the 21st century. We recognize the challenges of global mobility and the harm that reckless travel can cause, but we are also aware of the need for globally-minded citizens capable of solutions.

## **Be Informed**

There is no more important advice than being informed about your destination before you depart. In this sense, most of us already have sustainability practices and education built into our pre-departures. If you aren't working with students on this already, consider educating students on a destination's history, culture, language, and current events. Educate about its priorities, challenges, and efforts in practicing sustainability or protecting the local environment. Ask yourself and students such questions as what the water usage is like in a given country or how recycling is handled. How is public transportation different from their home country and how might one use low carbon-emission transportation in a safe way while abroad? Consider advising students to choose travel destinations based on their demonstrated commitment to sustainable practices including their human rights record, environmental conservation record, commitment to peace, etc.

For a quick list of important topics/questions to consider, see the following. Note that this is not a comprehensive list though.

- Waste Management / Recycling

- Public Transportation
- Water / Energy Usage
- Compost
- Local Food / Agriculture
- Environmental Policy / Law / History / Customs

## **Know Your Carbon Footprint**

By Carbon Footprint, we mean the overall carbon emissions impact you are having based upon the length and means of transportation from one spot to another. It can seem scary, but it's incredibly important to first recognize the harm we do through our travel. By first knowing and acknowledging the impact we have, we can then understand how much counter-actions we should take to negate our carbon emissions. This concept is the idea behind Carbon Offsetting. The SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee has already put together some phenomenal resources on Carbon Offsetting and you can find them in the free resource section of this guide.

### ***Carbon Insetting***

- Another topic to consider is Carbon Insetting. Where Carbon Offsetting recommends providing a counter-action to negate a carbon emission, Carbon Insetting recommends a specific counter-action that would benefit the area you are visiting. In practical terms, carbon offsetting may be the purchase of an offset from a third party group to counter carbon emissions, whereas carbon inserting would be a specific volunteer activity on-site at your host location to counter the carbon emissions.

### ***Regenerative Travel***

- Lastly, both of the above actions are focused on sustainable travel or the idea that we are doing no harm in our travel. In addition to these concepts, it never hurts to introduce students to one step further - regenerative travel. The idea of regenerative travel is to not only counter your carbon footprint, but to instead do more good than harm. This is a great practice to teach students as it aims at not only maintaining our status quo, but rather actually getting better.

These terms can be complex for students unaware of them and carbon offset purchases can be a nightmare to research if one is unaware of what is accurate or what is a scam. As such, try to include brief descriptions of carbon footprints, offsets, insets, and regenerative travel in your pre-departure literature. Give students recommended offset sites if possible, and establish carbon insetting directly into your pre-departure programming.

## **Sustainable Traveling**

During your pre-departure consider providing an opportunity to educate students on the basics of sustainable travel/transportation. This doesn't need to be an all-encompassing course,

but rather an opportunity to reflect on some of the bigger or easier items in traveling in a more sustainable fashion. Some of these concepts include:

### ***Airfare Can Have High Carbon Emissions***

- If you must fly, don't fly first class and try to take direct non-stop flights if possible.
- If flying is avoidable, avoid it. Use local and/or public transportation instead such as buses or trains. Traveling by land or sea instead of air can help to dramatically reduce a carbon footprint.

### ***Traveling Around Town/Country***

- While traveling around town try walking and cycling. These types of action provide the smallest carbon footprints. If walking or cycling is not practical, a good thing to keep in mind is to do as the locals do. Not only is this a great way to engage in the local culture, but your impact will be minimized by not engaging in a resource that is already being used. Did you know that a single full bus can take up to 40 cars off the road?
- If you need a personalized ride, try ride-sharing or carpooling when it's safe. The important thing here is safety, but if it's an option then ride-sharing can be a great way to reduce your impact.

## **Responsible Consumption**

Teaching students about their carbon footprints and sustainable travel is one thing, but it's equally important to inform them about the responsibility they have while on-site to act sustainably. The SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee put together some quick items on this below, but remember that this isn't a comprehensive list and it can change from locality to locality too.

### ***Sustainable Eating***

- Eat local if your diet allows. Eating local ensures you are doing your best to eat the foods available in the given country as well as those items that are in-season. Non-local eating typically means that your food has been shipped half-way across the world to make it to your plate. Equally important, eating local helps to support the local economy providing a necessary infrastructure for promotion of sustainable development.
- Even better than eating local, eat organic or vegetarian if the local culture allows. You don't have to be a strict vegetarian by any means too. Just reducing your meat intake by half can have a dramatic impact on your carbon footprint. "Accidental" or "Occasional" vegetarianism is a good route for students with specific dietary preferences or needs.
- Avoid wasteful pre-packaged, highly processed food when possible. Pack snacks for the flight instead of relying on food wrapped in single-use plastic. These types of items that require single-use plastic are avoidable and students should be encouraged to stay away if possible.

### ***Water/Energy Usage***

- Try turning off the lights wherever you are. Regardless of where you are, energy is never unlimited and doing what you can to reduce your usage is extremely important. Turning off lights when you leave a room or unplugging big electronics when you are not using them is a good first step to reduction.
- If it's safe, try reducing your heat or AC unit by just a few degrees. Even the smallest of changes compounded over the course of weeks and months can have a big difference.
- Observe local customs when it comes to water usage. Try reducing your usage from tooth brushing, showering, toilet flushing, dishes, etc. The less you use, the less impact you have on the community and local environment. This is especially important when talking about luxury/wasteful practices such as 30 min showers or keeping the faucet running while you brush your teeth.

### ***Avoid Mass Produced Souvenirs***

- Ask where a souvenir comes from and who you are supporting in it's purchase. Mass-produced items often have to travel half-way across the world just to reach their destination of selling. Equally, they don't support the local economy as much as non-mass-produced items. Consider buying unique and/or handmade items that have guarantees of providing support directly to the local community.
- Don't buy products made from endangered species or cultural/historical artifacts. Equally important, leave behind items that you find in the natural environment. For example, if hiking a volcano, leave behind the rock and purchase an item from the local market instead. You don't know the impact you are making by moving or taking an item out of its environment.

### ***Responsible Disposal***

- This may not be available in our study abroad destinations, but do your best to see what options are available for responsible disposal. This includes recycling, composting, or donating.
- Leave behind items that may be of use to future students in your program. Instead of throwing away a half-filled bottle of sunscreen, leave it for the next group if possible. Same thing for other bathroom products, clothes, maps, and more.

## **Sustainable Packing**

Packing is a simple thing that can make a world of difference when it comes to reducing a student's carbon footprint. Some simple strategies help to reduce our impact and often make our experience more affordable and enjoyable upon our arrival.

### ***Pack Light***

- In basic terms, the more luggage you bring on a flight, the more fuel is needed to fly that plane. Thus, packing even just a little bit lighter can have a big impact on your carbon footprint. By no means are we recommending leaving everything at home, instead we encourage students to think critically about whether they need that extra item that could be replaced or is a luxury.

### ***Reusable Items***

- Think of all the items that you use every day while at home. Likely these are all the same items that you may use every day while you are abroad. All of these items warrant thoughtful consideration of whether you can bring a reusable version instead of relying upon single-use versions while abroad.
- Some of the more common items in this category include: water bottles, utensils, and a backpack/day bag. Instead of relying on plastic water bottles given to you in the airport or plastic utensils at every market you visit, pack your own set of reusable materials that can be used over and over.
- Other items that may be useful depending upon the person: reusable coffee mug, headphones, solar battery charger, or a solar flashlight.
- Avoid half-using hotel or hostel toiletries. Pack what you need for your trip and minimize your plastic use.

### ***Pack Adjustable / Flexible / Minimal Clothes***

- Pack items that you don't mind wearing multiple times and in multiple ways. Outfits that can mix and match help you reduce the total amount of clothes you pack and thus the impact you have. Equally, packing clothes that can be left behind as donations (not as trash!) can also be very valuable.
- If your budget allows, it's not a bad idea to pack minimal clothes and then top up your wardrobe when you arrive. This will not only decrease your carbon footprint, but also increase the benefit you have on the local economy.

### **Reflect / Open Your Eyes While Abroad**

Reflection is critical to an impactful study abroad experience, but it's important to remind our students to do this even before they depart. Give them time to think about their own consumption habits and what they do on a daily basis at home. How will this change while abroad and what lessons might they learn?

### ***Green Passport Pledge Program***

- Consider implementing a Green Passport Pledge Program on your campus where students make a commitment to their best to travel sustainably. These types of practices give students a chance to really consider their actions and hold themselves accountable. We can't expect students to be perfect, but we can ask them to travel responsibly.

### **Parting Thoughts**

***Avoid the Savior Complex***

- Remind students to avoid the Savior Complex and a one-size fits all approach. Students should be studying abroad to learn and observe a new way of life. It's perfectly fine to share their own way of life, but just as important to allow the host culture to decide what to do with the info they give. Ultimately, each culture and country needs to handle sustainability in a way that fits them and this will not be the same for every country.

***Everyone Will Have Limitations to their Sustainable Goals***

- Limitations are a part of life. Don't beat yourself up because you can't go vegetarian or can't afford a direct flight. That's okay! The point here is to do our best and make changes where we can.

***Tie it All Back to the UN SDGs***

- The UN SDGs provide us all a phenomenal framework of sustainable development. It is becoming more common knowledge especially for incoming students. Tying sustainable travel to the UN SDGs can provide a concrete way of visualizing and understanding its importance.

***Free Resources Will Continue Onto the Next Page.***

## **Free Resources Appendix:**

1. Resources by the SUNY CIE Sustainability Committee
  - a. Packing Pre-Departure Infographic
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t-TTtFESV2hJ6VedMLGcS9kynypoYxt7/vi  
ew?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t-TTtFESV2hJ6VedMLGcS9kynypoYxt7/vi<br/>ew?usp=sharing)
  - b. Carbon Offset Infographic
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vl1q6Wils3NgCBTqHQPAdcVOcgA37257/  
view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vl1q6Wils3NgCBTqHQPAdcVOcgA37257/<br/>view?usp=sharing)
  - c. Carbon Offset Guide for Staff
    - i. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LpiGwZ7ZBmiE8OegmJQuoxl5VFy  
-hXELy7umS8sJU3w/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LpiGwZ7ZBmiE8OegmJQuoxl5VFy<br/>-hXELy7umS8sJU3w/edit?usp=sharing)
  - d. Carbon Offset Guide for Students
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zCYKcXnm6qVtVwTP9LG09qLpXMfjHwD  
4/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zCYKcXnm6qVtVwTP9LG09qLpXMfjHwD<br/>4/view?usp=sharing)
2. Sustainable Travel Video Links:
  - a. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OTdyc3J9mkahav15PrwXwhm4MkRxa2  
GmlfYiVC6\\_vg/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OTdyc3J9mkahav15PrwXwhm4MkRxa2<br/>GmlfYiVC6_vg/edit?usp=sharing)
3. Other Examples
  - a. SUNY ESF Sample Sustainability Pre-Departure Slides
    - i. [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1BBvyc5xd21aMkFW5wlKwxvFBI  
C5\\_uJnc\\_MhIK5mwvPA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1BBvyc5xd21aMkFW5wlKwxvFBI<br/>C5_uJnc_MhIK5mwvPA/edit?usp=sharing)
  - b. United Nations Act Now Guide
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zymv4luEAsW\\_o45PIS9RT3pa6JXFY3Vd  
/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zymv4luEAsW_o45PIS9RT3pa6JXFY3Vd<br/>/view?usp=sharing)
  - c. CIS Australia Pre-Departure Brochure:
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X99zMlup44tdHlpcGSSpfyvEVdnlvPck/vie  
w?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X99zMlup44tdHlpcGSSpfyvEVdnlvPck/vie<br/>w?usp=sharing)
  - d. SIT Packing List
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KH89uNjyIXI\\_WpwnBfsPik6abbgO0D4K/  
view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KH89uNjyIXI_WpwnBfsPik6abbgO0D4K/<br/>view?usp=sharing)
  - e. Other Sustainable Packing Links
    - i. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KH89uNjyIXI\\_WpwnBfsPik6abbgO0D4K/  
view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KH89uNjyIXI_WpwnBfsPik6abbgO0D4K/<br/>view?usp=sharing)
  - f. Other Sustainability Infographics Links
    - i. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y4LfCoOqS5lgS3\\_Nd9pMtD1EXss  
saKRZ/edit?usp=sharing&oid=103095067809488307343&rtpof=true&sd  
=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y4LfCoOqS5lgS3_Nd9pMtD1EXss<br/>saKRZ/edit?usp=sharing&oid=103095067809488307343&rtpof=true&sd<br/>=true)
4. Articles / Further Reading
  - a. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IAFq3scWleqJTj2AKzQ8ljD3-cmMntTb2M  
ey\\_qRxc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IAFq3scWleqJTj2AKzQ8ljD3-cmMntTb2M<br/>ey_qRxc/edit?usp=sharing)