



Minooka TAP's

*Big Ole Packet of Rules, Regulations,
and All the Stuff You Need to Know*

www.minookatap.com
www.facebook.com/minookatap
MinookaTAP2@gmail.com

Money

Money is one of the biggest challenges for Minooka TAP. It's the primary concern for parents, it's one of the biggest worries for the teachers, and it is the most difficult thing for teens traveling abroad to get used to. They don't spend money wisely, they have a hard time getting used to foreign currency, and saving and budgeting both seem to be four letter words to American kids. In this section we'll take a look at what Minooka TAP has to say about money.

The Cost of the Trip

The prices of the trip are set by our partner, EF Tours. We work with them to create itineraries that are fast-paced, exciting, and educational. Most of the activities we do on tour are included in the price of the trip. The tours are created with teenage Americans in mind, so they are done at a very low cost for what you get.

Parents and students are responsible for the costs of the trip and payments with EF Tours. Minooka TAP has nothing to do with these prices, although when we create our itineraries, we work to keep the costs as low as possible, while keeping the tour at a level of excellence that people in our community have come to expect from TAP.

The price of the trip with EF includes:

Airfare, hotels, a local tour guide with us 24/7, all transportation costs while on tour, breakfasts, dinners, and admissions to most of the activities we take part in while on tour.

The base price does not include:

Tips for our guides and drivers, lunches, snacks and drinks, or souvenirs. There may also be additional opportunities that arise while on tour that may cost travelers out of pocket.

Fund Raising

The first financial discussion we have with the students in our group is about fund raising. As the parents already know, the trips we take can be fairly expensive. When you break it down, it's a really good price for all that's included (much cheaper than traveling to these places without the power of a group or a ginormous tour company). We'd also argue that no matter the price, the experiences these kids have are invaluable, but that's not the point of this section.

Minooka TAP spends a great deal of time and energy fund raising. Who knows what will pop up this year, but in the past we've sold cookie dough, candy, pizza kits, and raffle tickets; we've hosted bowling events, chili dinners, and school dances; we've run dodge ball tournaments and teamed up with local restaurants and the Chicago White Sox to raise a few bucks. However, fund raising has to be a group effort – we need each student and their families to help with what we're doing. The

TAP teachers are committed to a few fund raisers each year, but the rest of the effort has to be on you. We expect the students and the parents to come up with and run a few fund raisers, the money raised benefits you guys, after all.

Why do we spend so much time and energy raising money when it's the kids, parents, and grandparents that are responsible for paying for the trip? Number one – we want the cost of the trip itself to be the only out of pocket expense for the families. Number two – well, let's break down the expenses the group has...

Educational and Travel Expenses

First, there's a ton of expenses that TAP covers before we even get to a foreign country – we buy educational resources like books, DVDs, and magazines; paper (no, we're not allowed to use the school's copiers or printers); and materials for class activities.

We also stockpile everything you could possibly imagine needing in a foreign country – batteries, flashlights, ponchos, and all sorts of medicine and 1st aid supplies for every conceivable situation.

When we're actually on the tour is where it starts to get really expensive. While overseas, we want to cover all the tipping expenses for our students and (if we've raised enough money) we try to cover any extra excursions that pop up while we're on tour too.

Tipping

Tipping eats up most of the money we raise, so we'll break down tips for everyone.

There are two types of guides we meet while on tour – our Tour Director and local guides.

Our tour director becomes like our mom. The TD is with us from the time we arrive at the foreign airport on day one, until they drop us off at the airport on the last day. The TD schedules all of our activities, teaches about everything we see and do, tries to get to know the group and see out additional unplanned activities that we'll enjoy, helps us with language and money, coordinates transportation, and is with us 24/7 to help us with everything we need.

For all they do, TDs don't get paid very well. Kind of like waiters and waitresses here in America, they work for tips. It's customary to tip the TDs between \$8-10 American per day, per person in the group for their services. That adds up real quick.

The second type of guide we meet on tour is called a local or city guide. These are people that are experts in their city's history (or the stories behind a particular site). They might be with us for an hour or two, or they may travel around with us for an entire day. During the trip, we might meet 5-7 different city guides, each of them giving us a unique insight into that part of their country. City guides also work for tips, and it's expected that we will tip them (depending on how good they are and how long they're with us) \$1-2 American per person in our group.

On top of that, we also have a driver with us most of the time. Drivers not only get us from point A to point B safely, they also work with the TD to find alternate plans and additional experiences, and they also load and unload all of our heavy suitcases on and off the bus each time we move to a different hotel. It is customary to tip the drivers \$3-4 per day per person in the group. If all goes well with our fundraising efforts, we are able to cover the tipping expenses out of TAP's account, so that none of the students have to worry about that. Adult travelers are another story – more on that later.

Extra Excursions

The TAP teachers plan out a ton of activities years before we leave for a tour, but while we're there, sometimes different stuff pops up. Who wants down time sitting and doing nothing in a foreign hotel? You never know if you'll get to visit Ireland, Spain, Japan, or Germany again, so you might as well squeeze every experience you can into each trip.

Sometimes the TDs get to know the kids well enough that they plan some activities during our free time that they think the kids will really enjoy. In the past, these excursions have included things like climbing Mt. Vesuvius, seeing live music in an Irish Pub, taking a horse cart through a national forest preserve, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a Japanese baseball game, tickets to a Shakespeare production, and visiting the catacombs underneath a city. Usually when we ask the kids about their favorite parts of their trip – it's the spur of the moment things like this they remember best. However, since it wasn't planned and paid for in advance, these things cost a few dollars (or Euros, pounds, dirhams, yen, or yuan). It's worth every penny (or whatever a foreign penny may be called).

The kids and their parents have worked hard enough to pay for the trip, so we try to have a few hundred dollars set aside for each student for these extras while we're on tour.

Emergency Fund

We haven't had to use one yet, but we like to have an emergency stash set aside in case we need it. Better safe than sorry.

Back to Fund Raising

With all that TAP covers, we generally need to have about \$400 per student traveler in our account, but we need help raising those funds. What we need is a commitment from each of our students to make every effort to raise their share of the funds.

Unfortunately, a few students in past years have made it so we have to be a little more strict about fund raiser participation. Since TAP spends about \$400 per student, we're asking that each kid help us raise at least \$400. We'll keep track of how much each student makes and keep you updated along the way.

Now, we're not going to be upset if you only help us raise \$397, because you probably worked pretty hard and that's close enough. However, a few years ago we had a kid who didn't do much at all, only helping us raise just \$3. We don't think it's fair to the other kids to have to cover his lack of

effort, so if something like that comes up again, we'll have to sit down with the student and their parents and come up with a fair way to handle things.

I'm hoping no one is thinking, "can I just write a check for \$400 so my kid doesn't have to help fund raise?", because that's not the point. Sure, we'd love to get a whole pile of \$400 checks, but participating in the fund raisers as a part of the group is part of the experience. The kids officiating the dodge ball tournament together bonded (when they weren't being pelted by stray dodge balls). The kids serving spaghetti together felt as if they accomplished something for our group. The kids that helped us sort tubs of cookie dough on a hot June day, rushing to get it into the freezer before it melted, had a shared experience that made them stronger members of our team. So, please feel free to write us a check for any amount you wish, but it doesn't exclude your student from helping.

If a student is doing that little to participate in our fund raising and making no effort to be a part of the group, the TAP teachers, the parents, and the student will have to sit down to discuss whether or not that student should be allowed to continue as a part of TAP.

In the end, if a kid doesn't make enough money to cover those costs – but it's due to bad luck, not lack of effort – then we'll just hope that a few other kids got luckier with their efforts and raised enough to cover the unlucky few. As long as everyone in the group is working hard towards that goal, that is what's important.

Foreign Currency

One of the earliest worries that teenagers traveling abroad have is how they're going to deal with foreign money. But, before you can deal with it, you have to have some, so this section will discuss getting your Euros, Pounds, Yen, Rupees, Pesos, or Francs.

You can get foreign money at currency exchange services or most banks. Some places have money on hand and you can walk in there today and get some. Other places will have to order it a few days or weeks in advance. Either way, please know two things.

1. They are going to charge you a **service fee**. This fee is usually a % of total amount you are exchanging. The more money you exchange, the lower the % they charge you. For example if you exchange \$100, they may charge you 15%, but if you exchange \$1,000 they may lower that rate to 10%, and for \$10,000 they may only charge you 5%.
2. You also have to deal with an **exchange rate**. We're not going to pretend to understand economics, but the basics are sometimes an American dollar is worth more and sometimes it's worth less. One day you might buy 100 Euros (European currency) and it'll cost you \$160 (plus the service fee) and the next week (or even in a different bank on the same day) it might cost you \$180. You always want to shop around for the best rate.

If all of this makes your head hurt, don't worry, TAP is here to help. For the last several years, we've been working with a currency exchange service in Naperville that always gives us a fantastic

deal. Because we always exchange such ridiculously large amounts of money, they give us the best rates possible and usually waive the service fee for us.

Since we're so nice, a few weeks before travel, we'll invite anyone in the group to join in with us. We'll take your money up to Naperville for you, exchange it at the lowest possible rate, and avoid that service fee. The last few years that saved people up to \$30-40. Of course, if you have a better deal, no one is required to join the group exchange. It's just a service we offer to make things cheaper and easier for some folks.

Once we have some foreign money in hand, we spend some time at one of our meetings familiarizing the students with it. They'll get to practice "buying" some stuff, counting the money, and learning some simple formulas to figure out how much American money they're spending each time they hand over a weird looking foreign coin or bill.

Budgeting

The next question you have is how much money to bring/exchange, and that's a difficult question to answer, because we don't know how much spending money each traveler has in their budget.

There are only a handful of expenses that travelers should be prepared for:

- *Lunches, snacks, and drinks*
- *Souvenirs*
- *Some extra excursions/admissions (if we meet our fund raising goals, TAP pays for extras like this when the entire group is involved, but sometimes we break into smaller groups of one teacher and a handful of students. In the past, we've been with smaller groups that wanted to go into a museum, a castle, or some sort of attraction that costs a few bucks. Since the whole group doesn't have that opportunity, the individual students will be responsible for those costs).*

We typically tell kids to budget around \$20 per day for lunch and snacks. \$20 should be enough to eat lunch and grab a snack in most parts of the world and have money left over to roll into the next day's budget. Some bigger cities like Tokyo and London were expensive, but that balances out when we visit small towns where things are cheap.

We never know what kind of souvenirs are going to catch someone's eye, so that's a difficult thing to budget for. We suggest that travelers make a list of things they want for themselves and gifts for family. Making a list for grocery shopping seems to work pretty well at keeping folks on track, so a souvenir list may help prevent silly expenditures and wasted money too.

Some kids have big purchases in mind before we even depart – in the past, we've seen kids spend big chunks of money on Moroccan carpets, swords, guitars, jewelry, and glass. If that's something that a kid really wants to buy and has thought it through, we think that buying one really incredible souvenir is waaaaaaaaaaaaaay better than a bunch of meaningless trinkets at every single stop. We do ask, however, that any time a kid is making a purchase over \$50 they talk it

over with one of the teachers (unless mom or dad is there) to make sure they're getting a good deal, that it's something that's worth the money, and that they will have enough cash to last them the rest of the trip.

Below is a worksheet we've created to prepare your budget. Please fill out the top before we leave, and do your best to keep up with the worksheet while we're overseas.

Minooka TAP's *Student Budget Worksheet*

How much money do you have in your spending budget?

A. _____

How many days long is this trip? _____ X \$20
(that's your daily lunch/snack budget).

B. _____

Subtract B from A, and you have your souvenir/extra excursion budget

C. _____

Take C and divide it by the number of days we're on tour, and you'll have the amount you can spend each day on souvenirs, other excursions, and gifts.

D. _____

We will give each student a budget sheet like this one in their student books. We ask each of them to take the time to fill it out each day.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Lunch Budget</i>	<i>Snack Budget</i>	<i>Souvenir, Gift, Extra Budget</i>	<i>Total Budget</i>	<i>Lunch Actual Cost</i>	<i>Snack Actual Cost</i>	<i>S,G,E Actual Cost</i>	<i>Other expenses</i>	<i>Total Spent</i>	<i>Left for Tomorrow</i>
<i>Example Day</i>	\$15	\$5	\$20	\$40	\$7 Sandwich and a drink	\$4 chips, candy, Coke at rest area	\$16 book \$5 shirt for mom \$11	\$11 \$3 for subway, \$8 for castle	\$38	\$2 (now you can add this amount to the next day's spending budget)
<i>Day 1</i> (most of this day is on a plane)										
<i>Day 2</i>										

<i>Day 3</i>										
<i>Day 4</i>										
<i>Day 5</i>										
<i>Day 6</i>										
<i>Day 7</i>										
<i>Day 8</i>										
<i>Day 9</i>										
<i>Day 10</i>										
<i>Day 11</i>										
<i>Day 12</i>										
<i>Day 13</i>										
<i>Day 14</i>										

How to Bring Your Money

Now that you've worked out your budget and know how much you have to spend, let's discuss how to bring it.

Bringing Foreign Currency

There are usually between 40 and 50 people in our group. When we get to the airport in Berlin, Athens, Rome, Dublin, Lisbon, Tokyo, London, Warsaw, or Johannesburg, we're going to hit the ground running and see some sites. We do not have the time to wait for 50 people to stand in line at the airport currency exchange or ATM. Besides – you get ripped off at the airport.

We recommend that everyone brings enough foreign currency to last AT LEAST the first 3-4 days. Most of the teachers just bring all of the money they want to spend in foreign cash.

We recommend the students divide their foreign cash up into envelopes. Put the money you budgeted for each day into a separate envelope to keep you from overspending. If you (or your parents) are nervous about bringing a large amount of money (or too many envelopes), a teacher will hold your money for you and distribute an envelope to you each morning if you wish.

However, while we are willing to do this, we do not like or recommend it. If a student is deemed responsible enough to travel to a foreign country without their parents, doesn't it kind of kill the "growing up lesson" if another adult holds their hand through the trip?

Currency Exchange/Banks

We never know when we're going to happen to see a currency exchange or bank. We never know if it will be actually open if we do see one. We also never know if the line will be short. You don't want to be the ONE traveler that is counting on a currency exchange or bank and will hold up the whole group. Bring enough foreign cash to last a while.

We will see currency exchanges at the airport, but we will not stop. When we land, we're ready to start our tour – we do not have time to wait for 40+ people to exchange money, and no one paid to go on this trip to stand and wait for the one or two travelers that were ill prepared.

ATMs

We will probably see ATMs when we're in larger cities, but we may not see them in small towns or out in the countryside. If you have less than one day's worth of money left in cash and you see an ATM, stop. Make sure the teachers know that you've reached that point, so we can help you keep an eye out for one. Tell the teachers a day or so in advance of running out of cash, so we can plan a trip when it's convenient for the whole group (like taking you to an ATM while the rest of the group is eating breakfast – but don't rush up to a teacher while they're eating with a cash emergency – plan ahead).

Realize that ATMs on the other side of the world are going to charge a really big service fee – probably two of them – one from the foreign bank for using your American card, and one from your bank for using a foreign ATM – so you want to use them as seldom as possible. When you use an ATM, take out enough money to last you several days (at least until the next bigger city).

If you are planning on using a bank card to withdrawal money, be sure to let you bank know every country you are visiting (including layovers) and the dates before we depart. If you don't, your bank may assume your card was stolen and put a freeze on it. That's not easy to fix from the other side of the world.

Credit, Debit, or Prepaid Credit Cards

Anything with a Visa or MasterCard logo on it will likely be accepted in most larger cities and tourist locations. However, we've run into situations where a perfectly good credit card was declined in one shop, then worked in another – in other words, do not count on them always working like they would at home. Additionally, some places (especially in smaller restaurants and shop) will not accept credit cards of any sort.

Traveler's Checks

Don't bring these. No one accepts them anywhere anymore. You will be broke.

Buying Gifts

Gifts are great. Sharing your travel experiences with your friends and family is fantastic, but you have to be practical and realistic.

Honestly, post cards are the least expensive (and most awesome) way to tell folks that you're thinking about them, so if you feel the urge to buy stuff for every single person in your 3rd period class, the entire wrestling team, and all 61 of your first cousins... postcards are the way to go.

Souvenir shops (which we will see everywhere) are also full of small, inexpensive items that would make great gifts – magnets, bookmarks, cups, CDs, books, shot glasses, little statues, stuffed animals, hats, shirts, and all sorts of trinkets can be found fairly cheap. Never buy this stuff in the first city, and never buy it in the biggest cities – it's always the same stuff (or close enough) and it's always cheaper in the small towns).

Sometimes you're looking for something really special – a glass vase for mom, a plate for grandma, a sweatshirt for dad... You have to be realistic and practical about these sorts of things. First, try to avoid stuff that's going to fill your suitcase very quickly. Second, try to avoid breakables.

Every once in a while, someone has something completely unusual that they really, really, NEED to buy for someone. Please be practical and realistic about gifts. Do not spend your limited time on this trip focused on finding a specific gift for someone – be flexible and general.

Remember, while we're over there, items that actually have some meaning to the place we're visiting make fantastic gifts. Just to give you some ideas, the last few years, these are the gifts that Mr. Curtis bought for his kids

- *China – stuffed animal pandas and a Chinese board game*
- *England – London Underground t-shirts, Shakespeare story books, and Robin Hood toys*
- *Japan – t-shirts from the Japanese baseball game we went to and toy samurai*
- *Spain – stuffed animal bulls, a book of Spanish fairy tales, and a wooden sword from the medieval castle*
- *Ireland – stuffed animal sheep, a book of Irish myths, and a four-leafed clover paperweight*
- *Italy – a Pinocchio doll and story book from the author's house and a toy car (a Fiat, popular Italian car)*
- *Greece – story book of Greek myths and Greek heroes vs. monster toys*
- *Germany – a Grimm Brothers story book and a toy German police car*

Below we are including a gift worksheet. We ask that the students actually take the time to fill it out in advance (when doing the budget worksheet).

Minooka TAP's Gift Worksheet

What we suggest is that you make a list of the family and friends you want to buy a gift for. Be sure to include anyone that helped you pay for your trip. Don't think of specific gift items yet, instead think of what TYPE'S of things your friend or family member might like. That will give you more options while we're on tour, and we won't have the whole group helping you search for something sill all week. Remember, sending a post card telling someone thank you or that you're thinking of them is probably the most meaningful and personal gift you can get them.

Person's Name	Their interests	Their shirt size (most foreign sizes will not match American sizes, so research online first)	How much I can spend on them?
---------------	-----------------	---	-------------------------------

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

-
- 6.
 - 7.
 - 8.
 - 9.
 - 10.
-

If you are buying for more than 10 people you need to seriously consider the post card thing, and ask yourself if you're going on this trip to experience the world or to shop for other people.

Adult Traveler Tips and Expenses

Tipping

We love having other adults travel with us. We've had moms, dads, cousins, sisters (never a brother), aunts, uncles, grandparents, family friends, and even a neighbor or two travel with our group. Each person adds a great deal to what we do, because each of you brings your personality, perspectives, and experiences to our adventure.

We'd also love your help with our fund raising efforts, however, Minooka TAP will not cover the costs for tips or other expenses for any of the adult travelers.

As we stated earlier, our TD, driver, and city guides work for tips, so we expect all adult travelers to contribute to the tip pool for that.

We'll give you two options:

- *You can tip for yourself, but please be sure to tip each guide appropriately. It reflects poorly on the group if we tip based on 48 travelers when we actually have 50 in our group, just because you and your spouse forgot to tip.*
- *You can let us handle all the tips for you. Give us \$180 before we depart (if you want to give it to us on the day of departure, make sure it's in cash). We will tip all of the city guides at the end of their time with us and tip the TD and the driver at that end of the tour on the entire group's behalf. So far, every single adult traveler we've ever had has selected this option for two reasons – 1. It's easier. 2. They understand that we have much more experience judging the amount to tip city guides, TDs, and drivers on an educational tour with a group of 40-50 people than they do.*

Extra Expenses

Every year we've had a few surprise opportunities. In Germany we got to visit a Medieval castle, in Greece we had the chance to see the ruins of King Minos' labyrinth, in Italy it was the Leaning Tower of Pisa, in Ireland it was a sheepdog training demonstration, and in Spain it was an evening

with tapas and Spanish Troubadours. Each of these experiences was incredible, but none were included in the price of the tour.

Our fund raising efforts help us offset these costs for our students, but adults will always be given the option to participate or opt out. If an adult traveler chooses to participate, they will be asked to pay the costs of these excursions up front (the ones listed above were all between \$15-\$20). Sometimes we'll know about these extras and their costs before we depart, sometimes we'll get a day or two's notice, sometimes it will be spur of the moment (if you're traveling with us you need to realize this is a fast-paced tour geared towards kids and you'll need to be flexible). No matter when they tell us about these opportunities, we will try to give you as much warning as possible so you can budget your money accordingly.

What to Expect

A Typical Day

Our trips are pretty structured, but every day is going to bring something new. There's no way to tell how we'll spend each and every day on the trip. Day 1 and the last day are our travel days, so they're especially hectic, but here's some guidelines on how an average day 2-11 will go.

Wake Up Call

Our days start early. Typically a student can expect a wake-up call between 6-7 am. Sometimes that's a phone call, sometimes a knock at the door. Sometimes an expected wake-up call doesn't come at all, so have a backup plan. Generally we wake students up about an hour before our scheduled breakfast time. The night before students have been "taped" into their rooms (more on that later), so they will be instructed to not leave their rooms until a TAP teacher has come to "release" them. (We understand that some parents travel too, and they may want to see their student earlier in the morning, but we ask that the students not open the door until the TAP teachers, who are responsible for all the other kids in that room, are there).

Around 30 minutes after the wake-up call, a teacher will knock on each student door to check that everyone is up. They'll generally have another 30 minutes to get dressed and ready for the day. Each day is different, though, so some days it will simply be getting their backpacks and going to breakfast, other days it will involve packing their whole suitcase to leave that hotel for good.

Breakfast

In Europe most of breakfasts have been pretty similar. Japanese breakfasts were... well, they were strange. In Europe we have a good idea what to expect, but somewhere else, breakfast is just part of the adventure.

In the past, breakfasts have always been a buffet. There are a few things that have (almost) always been available: juice, milk (room temperature), bread/toast/rolls, cold cuts, cheese, cold

cereal, and fruit. Sometimes (not often) you will find hot items like bacon (more like fatty ham that what we think of as bacon in America) or sausage, eggs, or warm cereals.

We recommend that everyone eat as much breakfast as they can. We have very full and active days, so skipping breakfast is not an option. If fruit is available, we ask that every kid have some every morning (fights off sickness). If hand fruits like apples, bananas, pears, or oranges are on the buffet, we want the kids to grab one or two extra to have healthy snacks later in the day.

The Bus

We'll spend a lot of time on the bus (some on trains too). Sometimes we'll wake up and tour the city we slept in, other times we'll wake up and travel early in the morning to a new place. Either way, the bus is a great time to relax, write in journals, catch up on our budget sheets, sleep a bit, or quietly talk to our friends.

We generally set up the seating so that the kids are in the back, the adult travelers in the middle, and the teachers in the front. This is so the kids can get a break from the grown folks, as well as making it easier for the teachers to communicate with the TD and the driver when necessary.

On short bus rides, the TD will often get on the microphone and talk to us about our plans for the day, teach local history, or tell stories about the country's culture. We expect that everyone on the bus try to stay awake and pay attention to these talks (even the teachers fall asleep sometimes, so it's okay if you do once or twice). If you are awake, we expect you to listen respectfully and encourage you to ask questions.

On longer rides, the TD will talk a bit at the beginning and end of the journey, but will give you plenty of time to nap and write in your journal.

When you get off the bus, the TD will always tell us about how long it will be before we see the bus again – sometimes it's an hour, sometimes it's all day. Paying attention there will help you decide what you can leave on the bus and what you need to take with you, so pay attention. When we're not there, the bus will be locked, so leaving a few things is okay, but we never recommend leaving valuables behind, just in case.

In the past, some drivers let us eat on the bus. We'll stop every now and again for gas, bathrooms, and snacks. If the driver asks you not to eat on the bus, please honor his wishes. If he allows eating or drinking, please be respectful and pick up your messes. At the end of each night when we get to the hotel, students will be expected to make sure the entire back of the bus is spotless. It is not the driver's job to pick you after you, so you will.

Tour Activities

Once we get where we're going it is always going to be something different. We may be touring a castle, taking a walk around the city, visiting a museum, hiking through a park, or watching a performance. No matter what it is, these are the reasons you came on this trip. Here are a few rules to make sure you make the most of the experience:

- *"Teacher Up" – quickly get into assigned groups so we can keep track of everyone*
- *Absorb*
- *Interact*
- *Ask questions*
- *Read ahead*
- *No headphones, MP3 players, games, or cell phones*
- *Respect the other tourists, your fellow travelers, and the guides*
- *Don't wander off. The guides will give you plenty of time to take the perfect picture, so while they're talking, stay with the group and listen*
- *Remove hats when we enter a religious building*
- *Dress appropriately*
- *Be prepared with sunscreen*
- *Bring water at all times (filtered water bottles are a necessity)*
- *If you're bored with something, do a really good job of faking that you're interested*
- *Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footsteps*

Lunch/Freetime

We will usually have some free time in the middle of the day. This is our time to eat lunch, do a little shopping, and see the things we want to see that are not on the regular tour.

We already discussed budgeting for lunch, so here are a few guidelines for eating it:

- *Stay within your budget as best you can*
- *Try new things*
- *Ask our TD or city guide what food that city is best known for and where you can get it*
- *Break into smaller groups so that restaurants don't get over crowded and it takes too long*
- *Try to find someplace quick to eat, so that you can eat "on the go," and spend as much time as possible seeing everything you can*
- *This one contradicts the previous tip, but sometimes the meal is the experience. In Spain and Japan, sometimes the best way to experience the places were to take your time and eat. If that's the case, go for it, but be aware of time*
- *Be aware of time*
- *American fast food places like McDonald's, Subway, and KFC are off limits (unless there's no choice). The only exception is when you need a bathroom or a drink.*
- *No headphones, MP3 players, games, or cell phones at meal time*

After lunch, you will probably have some free time. That free time has been as short as an hour, but it's been as long as six hours. It all depends on what else we have on our schedule that day. Here are some tips for a successful free time:

- *Plan ahead. If you do your research, you could make a list of the things you want to see in each town we visit. Check off the things that are included in the tour, then figure out what is most important to you out of what's left.*
- *Try to find something you can't see anywhere else. This town may have a cool castle, but if we're seeing nine other castles, what can you see here that we won't see other places?*

- *Know how to read a map. Getting lost wastes time. Planning poor routes wastes time. Picking a few interesting things that are close to one another saves time.*
- *Ask locals. Interacting with people is the best part of the trip, and besides, who knows a city better than the people that live there?*
- *Walk fast.*
- *No headphones, MP3 players, games or cell phones.*
- *Don't worry about shopping. There will always be time to shop – castles, museums, even churches usually have gift shops, so there will always be places to buy gifts and souvenirs. Don't waste what little free time you have in silly tourist shops.*

Dinner Time

After free time we usually have more planned activities. Sometimes it's time to travel, sometimes it's another excursion, sometimes it's a show of some sort. Eventually, though, we'll go to dinner.

Dinners are preplanned. In the past we've seen a few buffets where you get to take whatever and however much you want. Other times there has been a small menu (usually no more than 2-3 choices) you can pick from. However, most of the time it's already been decided what you're going to get for dinner. (If you have allergies or are a vegetarian, you need to tell us ahead of time).

At dinner you will be expected to eat politely, follow local customs (as best you can), and show good table manners. You are asked to at least try all foods (we do tell you to bring snacks in your suitcase in case you don't like the dinners), but if you don't like something we won't force you to eat all of it – just don't decide you don't like it if you haven't tried it yet. If you are unwilling to be adventurous and try new foods, you should probably join a different club.

You need to be courteous to other diners and to the restaurant staff. Hats, headphones, and phones are to be put away during meals. Dinner is an excellent time to socialize, so try sitting with different people each night. Sit by your friends sometimes, but other times eat with a teacher, with a parent, someone else's parent, a kid you don't know very well, or even the TD (some of them like this a lot).

In Europe the dinner is often served in courses, and we almost always get dessert, so be ready for that. In Japan almost all your food is there for you as soon as you sit down, and in China everything is served family style – be prepared for everything and anything.

Hotels

Hotels seem to be the place where kids have the most opportunity to get themselves in trouble, so let's take a moment to remind you that you were chosen to go on this trip. You wrote an essay that proved to us that you were eager to work hard, and your teachers wrote letters of recommendation that praised your responsibility and maturity. Prove us and them right.

Hotels are a nice place to keep our stuff, take a shower, and get some rest. That's it.

The hotels we get are usually pretty small. We request hotels that are closer to the cool stuff, but the in European cities space is limited, so sometimes we get a hotel that used to be a castle, an old house, or even part of the city walls. The hotels are sometimes like what we're used to at home, but sometimes it's not even close. Sometimes seeing unique hotels is one of the most interesting parts of the trip.

You are guaranteed four things in the hotel:

- *Safety*
- *A bed*
- *A toilet*
- *A shower*

You don't need anything else from a hotel on a trip like this. However, there have been some incredible hotels with game rooms, basketball courts, pools (we will not be swimming), fantastic views, and even snack bars. Sometimes you get a TV, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you get a phone (don't use it), and sometimes you don't. It's okay. You don't need any of that stuff. You need to be safe with a bed, a toilet, and a shower.

The hotel rules are simple.

When we first arrive at a hotel, we will unload all the suitcases from the bus. We ask that all travelers help us with this task. Before taking your own bags, please help get all the bags out and lined up in a safe place. Sometimes we have to do this quickly while our bus blocks traffic, so we need to use teamwork and act quickly and safely. Please be prepared to listen and help.

At this point a few of the teachers will go into the hotel with the TD to get our room keys. Our groups are very large and most of the hotel lobbies are very small, so we ask everyone to wait quietly and take as little space as possible while we sort out our room assignments.

When you get your key, quietly take your belongings to your room. Sometimes there are elevators, sometimes not, but when there are 40-50 of us checking in at once, the lines can be quite long. If you are on the first few floors, we suggest you use the stairs.

Before heading to your room, you should know the schedule. Sometimes we'll have dinner after checking in, sometimes we have meetings, a walk around town, or be ready to go to bed for the night. No matter what it is, you need to know where to be and when to be there.

Every night you will be given a list of times. In your room time, lights out time, wake-up time, downstairs for breakfast time, and on the bus time. You can probably figure out what those things mean. We post a written schedule in a common area of the hotel, so most kids just take a picture of the schedule to remember everything.

Sometimes we arrive at the hotel and have a bit of time before lights out. Now is a good time to tell you that we'll treat you like adults until you give us reason not to. If we have free time in the

hotel, make sure you act responsibly and safely. Never allow people into your room that aren't in our group. Never walk around the hotel without a buddy. Never open your door to a stranger. And all the other things that should be common sense.

When it's time to be in your room, a teacher will come by each room and go over the times for lights out, wake-up, breakfast, and bus departure. We'll make sure everyone is in the room they belong in and provide you with parent and teacher room numbers in case of an emergency. At that point your door will be taped (meaning a small piece of clear tape will be placed on your door, across the frame. No, the tape will not lock you in, but if you open the door for any reason, the tape will either break or peel off and the teachers will know you've broken the rules).

Here are a few guidelines to make sure we are safe and respectful when we're in the hotels:

- *Be quiet in the rooms*
- *Be even quieter in common areas like the hallways, elevators, stairs, lobby, & dining rooms*
- *Pick up your suitcase when going up and down stairs – do not let it bang on the steps*
- *If a member of our group needs help with their suitcase, be the awesome one that offers*
- *Be courteous to other guests and hotel staff*
- *When you are in your room, keep the door closed*
- *When walking around the hotel, stay with a friend at all times*
- *Never leave one person behind in a public area of the hotel*
- *Do not touch other people's belongings*
- *Do not unpack your whole suitcase; we won't be in any hotel very long*
- *Do not put anything in the closets or drawers – it's too easy to forget when we're leaving in a hurry the next morning, and we will not go back for whatever it is that you left*
- *Work out a shower schedule with roommates so everyone can be on time in the morning*
- *Wake up and get out of bed when the wake-up call comes*
- *Do not open the door to anyone except a TAP teacher unless there is an emergency*
- *Be ready and on time for breakfast and departure in the morning*

Rooming Assignments

You will have roommates in the hotels. Most of the time students will be rooming in groups of four, but we have seen groups of 2 and 3. Of course, girls room with girls, and boys with other boys.

The first night or two, we'll let you room with your friends, but after that we mix up the rooming assignments so you get to meet new people and make different friends. We don't expect that every one of you will walk away from every roommate experience with a new best friend, but we do think it's a good idea to spend time talking to other people and sharing different perspectives on the trip. Please do your best to get along with each of your roommates. If you don't like them, then go to sleep early.

Adult Rooming Assignments

Grown up travelers have two options. They can have a single room (that needs to be arranged with EF well in advance), or they can have a roommate. Adult rooms are only singles and doubles. Adults can either pick another grown up traveler or TAP will assign you a roomie.

Dress Code

Our dress code is simple. We want you to be comfortable, but we need you to be dressed appropriately so that you do not offend anyone in the foreign country.

Shoes

In the airports and when we are out on tour, you will wear tennis shoes and socks. We walk a lot, and tennis shoes offer the comfort, support, and protection you need. The last few years several students bought some tennis shoe/sandal type shoes – Teva and Keen both make good sandals that keep your feet cooler than regular tennis shoes, but still have thick soles and cover your toes. Those are okay with us.

In the hotels, on the plane, or on the bus, you're welcome to wear flip-flops, slippers, sandals, or whatever is comfortable to you.

Pants/Shorts/Skirts

Just like at school, we don't allow ripped pants. If you wear shorts or a skirt, they must be appropriate length. Do not be the one that makes the entire group late because a teacher has to send you to your room to change your clothes before we get on the bus.

Shirts

T-Shirts are great. Long sleeve t-shirts are equally great. Hoodies are the greatest thing ever. You don't go on a trip to be part of a fashion show, so keep things simple. T-shirts, long sleeve shirts, and hoodies are simple layers that you can take on and off (stuff them in your backpack when it's hot, wear more when it's chilly) when needed.

On airport days we ask that you wear a TAP shirt so you stand out from the crowd.

If we're traveling somewhere hot, we will allow you to wear tank tops during the day (no spaghetti straps, no shirts with sleeves cut or torn off), BUT if you decide to wear a tank top, be sure you have another shirt with sleeves with you at all times. Some restaurants, churches, or other religious buildings will not let you in if your shoulders are uncovered. Again, please do not be the one that ruins part of the trip for the whole group because you did not dress/pack correctly.

Hats

Hats are great for keeping the sun off your face and out of your eyes. You may wear a hat, but you must take it off at meals and when we enter religious buildings.

Headphones

You may listen to your music on the plane, on the bus (unless the guide is talking to us), and while in your room. You may not have your headphones out when we are at meals, on tour, or having meetings.

Basics to Ensure Everyone Has a Good Trip

- *Be on time*
- *Don't touch other people's things*
- *Take care of your things*
- *Keep the volume down*
- *Be polite to everyone we meet*
- *Help other people in our group if they need it*
- *Spend your money wisely*
- *Try new things*
- *Ask questions and interact with the guides*
- *Be where you're supposed to be when you're supposed to be there*
- *Be prepared to move in and out of hotels and buses quickly*
- *Leave all hotel rooms and buses in the condition you found them in*
- *Stay with the group*
- *Listen*
- *Use common sense*

The Planes and Airports

Departure Day

The day we leave, we will meet several hours before our flight. We usually meet in the Minooka Intermediate School commons. When you enter, we'll have a series of stations set up. At these stations, the teachers will:

- *Collect your passports*
- *Distribute your books*
- *Have you fill out an EF Tours luggage tag*
- *Check to see that your backpack and suitcase are packed appropriately*
- *Check to see that you are dressed appropriately for travel*
- *Weigh your suitcase to make sure it is under 45 lbs. Remember the lightest suitcase (as long as it has everything you need in it) gets a prize*

"Teacher Up"

Before we get going, the kids will be assigned their "teacher up" groups. Instead of trying to count our entire group of 40+ people, each teacher will be assigned 5-6 kids. When one of the teachers calls out "Teacher Up" all the kids will need to quickly and quietly get with their groups.

Once a teacher has all their students, they raise their hand. Mr. Curtis then only has to count the teacher hands to make sure we have everyone in our group.

While on the trip, we will “teacher up” every time we get on and off the bus (or a train or boat) to make sure we have everyone. After we’ve counted, kids will be free to spend the tours with their friends. Before we leave MIS, we will “teacher up” for the first time.

The School Bus

One of the expenses TAP covers with our fund raising money is our ride to the airport. All travelers are welcome to take the bus with us. If you choose to drive separate to the airport, TAP will not be responsible for you (whether you’re an adult or a student) until YOU FIND US at the airport.

We generally schedule the bus to leave 4-5 hours before our flight time. This gives us plenty of time to get to the airport, get through check in, get through security, and find our gate. If you are not at MIS by the scheduled departure time, the bus will leave without you and you will have to find your own way to the airport and figure out how to meet up with the group.

Before you say get on the bus, say goodbye to your parents and thank them for allowing you to have this incredible opportunity. Get on the bus and move all the way to the back, filling in every seat.

We’ll go ahead and mention it now – there will be no school bus ride back home at the end of the trip. Each traveler will need to have a ride waiting for them at the airport when we land. Please make sure a ride is there, because the teachers cannot leave the airport until all students have been picked up, and we’ve been away from our families for two weeks too, so we really want to go home.

The Drop Off

Getting dropped off at the airport is always hectic. You have to pull up to the curb, jump out of the car, grab all your bags, and say goodbye to whoever drove you there – all quickly enough that none of those airport cops yell at you for taking too long.

Imagine doing that with a bus load of kids, 40 backpacks, and 40 suitcases. That’s why we’ll spend hours talking about the drop off and training the group to do it right. Here’s the steps:

- 1. The driver will pull up outside the airport where there’s a large chunk of empty sidewalk.*
- 2. All girls (including adults) quickly get off the bus. They each take their own backpacks and all of the boys’ backpacks.*
- 3. All females find a spot on the sidewalk out of the way of other travelers.*
- 4. Boys (including adults) will begin unloading the suitcases, forming an assembly line.*
- 5. The assembly line will end near the girls, who will arrange suitcases in neat rows (don’t worry about what belongs to who, just get them out of the way & watch them closely).*
- 6. When the last bags are unloaded, the teachers will check the bus for dropped or lost items.*
- 7. While the teachers are doing that, everyone else should go stand next to their own suitcase.*
- 8. The bus will depart.*
- 9. The group will “teacher up.”*

Airport Check In

Sometimes airlines like to make things easier for large groups. Sometimes they treat us just like everyone else. When we first get inside the airport, we will take the group to an open area near our airline's desks where we can stop for a moment and be out of the way. Some of the teachers will then try to convince an airline employee to let us check in as a group. If they do, we will be escorted (getting back into our "teacher up" groups) to the group check-in.

If they don't allow group check in, we'll stand in line with everyone else. If you are traveling with a family member, stay with them. If you are on your own, stay with your "teacher up" group.

Check-in never happens quite the same, but we will always allow one of the teachers to check in first. When they are done, they'll go back to a large open area that's out of the way, so the entire group can all get through check in and gather back together before we move to security.

For check in, you will need your passport. After you've received your boarding pass, make sure you give your passport back to your assigned teacher.

Security

Once our whole group is back together again and all the passports have been returned to the teachers, we'll move on to security.

Security is the most difficult part of the airport even when you're traveling alone, so imagine how difficult it can get with 40-50 people going through together if you're not prepared for it.

Our suitcases will be handed off at check-in, so all we'll have is our backpacks at this point. Since those backpacks will already be packed appropriately (more on that in the "packing" section), all we have to do is get ourselves ready.

The security line gets slowed down when people are disorganized, unprepared, and not paying attention. They set off the metal detector because they forgot they had keys in their pocket and have to go back. They don't have their liquids packed the right way, so they get pulled aside. They forget to take off their belt until the last second... all of those things make security slow for everyone else.

We will not be the ones that slow it down for everyone. We'll get our group of 40+ through security faster than a family of five gets through. Here's how:

As we're approaching the front of the security line –

- *Remove everything from your pockets (keys, wallet, phone, money...). Put it all in a Ziploc bag. Put the bag in your backpack. (this saves you from having to dig through your backpack later for everything).*
- *Remove your hats, belts, and any hoodies or jackets. Put those in your backpack.*
- *Take off your shoes.*

- *Take the Ziploc bag of liquid toiletries out of the front pocket of your backpack*

Now, instead of getting to the front of the line and throwing a million small items into the x-ray machine trays/bins, you have only four things to worry about – backpack, bag of toiletries, left shoe, and right shoe. Security gets slow when people are trying to juggle jackets, hats, belts, shoes, wallets, phones, carry-on bags... we won't be the ones slowing down the whole line.

When you get to the front of the line –

- *Pay attention*
- *Listen to the security people*
- *Follow directions*
- *If pulled aside for extra security checks, ask to have a parent or teacher with you*

When you get to the other side of security –

- *Pick up your backpack, toiletries, and shoes*
- *Get out of the way*
- *Find the group (we try to have a teacher go through first, then they find another area for us to meet back up as a group)*
- *Get to the group*
- *Put the toiletries back in the front pocket of your backpack and zip it closed*
- *Put your shoes on*
- *Do not worry about your wallet, keys, phone, coins, hats, belts, or jackets until we get to our gate (if your pants are going to fall down without your belt, you should have worn different pants)*

The Gate

We should get to the gate with plenty of time – that's the plan, anyway. At this point, if you want to go to the bathroom, get a snack or drink, or just wander around to stretch your legs, you are allowed to. However, please follow these rules:

- *Don't spend money stupidly. Airport food is very expensive, so don't eat just because you're bored. You should have eaten a healthy meal before we left home. There will be food on the plane, and there should be snacks in your bag.*
- *Stay with a buddy at all times, and do not leave anyone behind.*
- *Let your teacher know if you're wandering.*
- *If you wander, either take your backpack with you or leave it with another member of the group who plans to stay at the gate.*
- *Be fair to the person you left your bag with, and give them a chance to wander too.*
- *If you agree to watch someone's stuff, watch it.*
- *Don't go too far from our gate.*
- *Do not go back through security.*
- *Be back way before boarding time.*

The Plane Ride

We don't make the seating chart on the plane. Sometimes our whole group is together, sometimes we're all over the place. Make the best of the ride and spend as much time as you can sleeping.

- *When you get on board, go to your assigned seat.*
- *Your teacher will come check on you before take off.*
- *If you are surrounded by strangers, we will try to find an adult member of our group to switch seats with you so you can sit by someone from our group.*
- *If you aren't sitting by your best friend, too bad – make a new friend.*
- *Watch movies, listen to music, read a book, sleep.*
- *Do not get up and wander around for no reason.*
- *Do not talk too loud.*
- *Do get up and stretch your legs every few hours.*
- *Try to time bathroom breaks with other people in your row.*
- *Whatever they give you to eat, eat as much of it as you can. Even an airline can't screw up bread and fruit, so at least eat those.*

Layovers/Flight Changes

If we have to switch planes at any point in our travels, please be ready to do so quickly. When the plane lands, you should already have your belongings gathered up. Put everything in your backpack so that you only have one thing to worry about. Anything you leave on the plane is gone.

Landing at our Final Destination

At some point during our flights into the foreign countries, every traveler will be given an arrival card to fill out. This is so the foreign country can keep track of all the visitors entering their country and where they'll be. You'll need to know some basic information like your name and address, and some trickier stuff like your passport number and the address of our first hotel. Don't worry – it's a long plane ride and we'll have some time once we land too – to get those filled out. There's no reason to freak out and climb over seats to find out the information you need for that card. Just relax – the teachers have done this before.

After we de-board the plane, we will gather everyone up in an open area. We will "teacher up" and on our way to baggage claim, we will stop at a bathroom. We'll take the time to use the bathroom, and some people like to wash their face, brush their teeth, apply deodorant, and even change their shirt. All of these things are very good ideas, but be respectful and don't leave globs of toothpaste in the airport bathroom sinks or take up so much space it bothers other travelers.

When we get to baggage claim, we will help each other get all the bags off the conveyer belt. Once you have your bag, move out of the way. Once again, our group will find an open, out of the way area to congregate while we wait for everyone.

If any luggage is missing, the group will wait while a teacher and the person missing the bags go to report it. Generally if luggage is lost it will find us in a day or two, so there's nothing to do but report it missing so it can hurry up and be found.

Once we all have our bags, we will “teacher up” and head towards customs. At customs, the officials will take your passport and decide whether or not to allow you into the country. Unless you give them a reason not to, they’ll stamp your passport and you’ll move along. Customs officials will usually ask you simple questions like – where you came from, how long you’re staying, and why you’re in their country. We’ll practice those answers before we go.

After customs, “teacher up.” The whole group will then move together through the gates. It’s here that we’ll meet our Tour Director and our adventure will really begin.

Rules and Consequences

The rules are very simple. We need to accomplish three things:

- 1. Make sure everyone is having fun. Fun is worth 10 points.*
- 2. Make sure everyone is learning. Learning is worth 100 points.*
- 3. Makes sure everyone is safe. Safety is worth 1,000 points.*

If you are doing anything that prevents any of the other travelers from having fun, learning, or being safe, there will be consequences. Those consequences may include:

- 1. Restricting your freedoms while on tour. Meaning, you’re a teacher’s shadow. No time with friends or the other kids, instead you stick with the adults until you prove that you can be trusted to act right.*
- 2. Changing your bus seat. If you can’t act right on the bus, you will get to sit up front with the boring adults. It’s awful up there, because we talk about boring things and listen to terrible music.*
- 3. Changing your room assignment. If we cannot trust you to behave, you will get to have adult roommates. Boys with male teachers, and girls with female teachers. Teachers will not give up their beds, so if you get moved, you get to sleep on the floor. If you don’t like the floor, you should have behaved.*
- 4. Send your butt home. If we believe that your behavior jeopardizes the safety of the group, you will be sent home. The TD will drive you to the airport, your parents will be sent a bill for the cost of your plane ticket, and your tour will be over.*

Communicating with Home

Technology changes so fast and new apps are being invented as I type this, so I’m reluctant to put much down here in writing that will be obsolete before I print it.

The bottom line is simple – sometimes cell phones work overseas, sometimes they don't. When they do work, it is very expensive to call or text home.

We suggest that the students bring a device that can connect to WiFi and be used for applications like Skype, Viber, or FaceTime. These all seem to work just fine (no guarantees though) when we are in a WiFi zone. If you do not have a WiFi enabled device of your own, we suggest you and your parents talk to another student and their parents weeks (or even months) before we depart to make arrangements to share with another student.

WiFi spots are not easy to find, and we did not travel to the other side of the world to search for WiFi. Some, but not all, of our hotels will have WiFi. Most European and Asian hotels we've encountered that have WiFi only have it in certain areas of the hotel – like the lobby or a coffee shop (where you'll have to make a purchase to get the password). In fact, WiFi becomes one of the biggest contentions of the entire trip, so we have set some ground rules.

- 1. There are no phones allowed a meal times, while we're on tour, or on the bus.*
- 2. When there is WiFi in our hotel rooms, go crazy and contact whoever you want, but make sure you're on WiFi so you don't get charged a gazillion dollars. TAP teachers will not be responsible for your phone bill.*
- 3. When there is WiFi in the hotel lobby or other public areas, we do not want 40 students all crammed into a small space slowing down the connection speed for all the other guests of the hotel. Instead, we will give each group of students a 15-20 minute shift to make their calls home at the end of each day (or in the morning if that works better).*
- 4. When it is not your turn to be on the WiFi, try talking to the people you're actually with. You'll see everyone else when you get home, but should you really be wasting your time on this trip texting the other side of the world? Say hi to mom and dad, then get back to this experience.*
- 5. Every day, the TAP teachers will make every effort to find WiFi long enough to make (at minimum) a status update on Facebook, notifying people back home that all is well. When there is time, TAP teachers will try to upload at least one picture of each student traveler to our Facebook page each day.*

Because of the technology and how it works in different parts of the world, we do not guarantee that every student will get to call, text, or Skype home every day. We will make every effort to see that each kid is able to personally contact home at least once during the trip, but TAP's Facebook page will serve as the primary source for communication from the group.

Of course, there are other options for contacting home, so we'll briefly cover them:

Calling Cards

Hotel phones will still cost a ton to use, and pay phones are as rare on the other side of the world as they are here now, so calling cards are not terribly reliable. They are the cheapest option, but not the most reliable.

An International Plan on Your Cell Phone

Only certain cell phones work overseas. It has something to do with the way their network is configured. You have to talk with your service provider to see if your phone even works overseas, but even then it may be hit or miss. Mr. Curtis had a T-Mobile phone in Germany in 2006, it worked perfectly fine every day even though he did not have an international plan. He had an AT&T phone in Spain (and this time he bought an international plan) and it didn't work once.

Sometimes to get your phone to work overseas you have to enter codes and press secret buttons, but all of that has to be done while you're at home in the United States, so be sure you know what to do before we leave. TAP teachers will not be responsible for your phone working.

Renting an International Phone from Your Service Provider

Some cell phone providers will rent you an international phone. You lose the contacts and features of your regular phone but there's a little more guarantee that it will work where we're going.

We'll never say that any piece of technology is 100% guaranteed to work, but if your company offers this service, it would be one of the best ideas. This is a service designed for international business travelers, not teenagers on an educational trip, so it may be overkill.

Renting a Phone from a Third Party

There are companies that rent very basic phones to international travelers for very good rates. The phones are not international phones, they are local phones – meaning if you travel to Japan, you're not getting an American phone that works in Japan, you're getting a Japanese phone.

We've never actually had anyone in our group use this option, but we've heard it's a very reliable, but pretty expensive option. This is another service designed for business people who travel abroad, and may be more service and more cost than is necessary.

Internet Cafés or Hotel Lobby Computers

We will not spend time looking for an internet café. Sometimes there are computers for guest use in the hotel lobbies. They are usually expensive, but students that are willing to pay for them may use them for a limited time.

Bottom Line on Phones

We recommend using your current phone or tablet and plan on using it in Wi-Fi only. We've found that Skype, Viber, and Facetime are the most reliable and cheapest options. We do not recommend wasting time or money on any other avenues, but we shared them with you to explain why.

Eating and Drinking

The famous author James Michener once said, "If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion, and avoid the people, you might better stay at home." That's a very nice way of saying – try new stuff, it's the best part of the experience.

We already discussed breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but we need to cover a bit more. Our tours consist of traveling half way around the world, being incredibly active all day, getting less sleep than you may be used to, and being out in the sun a lot. Your body will be dealing with a ton already, so you need to be sure to eat and drink enough. In the past, some of our travelers have gotten sick or dehydrated, and in almost every case it was because they weren't eating the right foods or drinking enough WATER.

Here are some food and drink tips to make sure you have a fantastic trip:

- *Eat as much healthy food as you can.*
- *Whenever fruit is available, eat as much as you can. If you don't like fruit, learn to like it. If there's a buffet with hand fruits (bananas, oranges, pears, apples...) on it, take a few extra pieces with you in your backpack if you can.*
- *Avoid too much candy or salty snacks during the day. Sure, we all want to try the weird candy bar or the strange looking chips in a foreign country, but that shouldn't be the only thing you eat all day. All that salt and sugar won't give you the energy to keep going long, and it will aid in dehydration. If you want to try chips or candy, try sharing them with a few friends – that way you get to taste the weird stuff without filling your body with garbage.*
- *Drink plenty of water. On a hot day, you should be drinking 8-10 glasses of water. That's 5 or 6 of those small plastic bottles.*
- *You are required to have a filtered water bottle with you on tour. You should be drinking the whole thing 2-3 times every day. This is way cheaper than 5-6 bottles of water.*
- *Realize that pop and other sugary drinks are going to dehydrate you. Avoid more than one soda or fruit punch type drink per day while on tour.*
- *Eat your breakfast and dinner. Those are already paid for, so eat as much as you can.*
- *Have a stash of HEALTHY snacks in your backpack/suitcase. Bring dried fruit, trail mix, granola bars, protein bars, and nuts. All of these things will keep your tummy full and your body healthy.*
- *Try new things. Every day plan to eat something you've never had before. Be adventurous. If you take a bite of something and don't like it – well, at least you tried something new. Eating is part of this adventure.*
- *Keep a food journal. Try to remember the tastes, textures, and smells of interesting new foods you try.*
- *We need to know about any special dietary needs (diabetes, allergies, vegetarian...). We're going to risk being rude and insensitive for a second – if you're a vegetarian for religious,*

cultural, or ethical reasons, that's awesome. If you're a vegetarian because you think it's cool or because you just don't like meat – We would rethink that for a minute – the vegetarian dishes provided in some foreign countries will not be enough to fill you up and keep you healthy. Please, if you do not eat meat, bring something else to provide yourself with the protein you'll need – protein bars, trail mix, or nuts.

- *Being a picky teenager is not a dietary need.*
- *We do not allow stops at American fast food places – McDonald's Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut (unless there's no other choice) are all off limits.*

Weekly Meetings

Leading up to our tour, we will be doing a great deal of work to learn about our destination country's history, language, music, art, literature, traditions, food, and culture.

We meet on Saturday mornings from 9am – 12pm for 8th graders, 11am – 1pm for 7th graders. The calendar for the year can be found on our website – www.minookatap.com/calendar

At the meetings we will discuss our trip, how to prepare for it, the culture and history of our destination country, and fund raising opportunities.

We are very understanding about students who are involved in other activities, but we would appreciate knowing in advance when students are going to miss meetings. If you need to come late or leave early, we understand. We'd rather have you here for part of a meeting than not at all.

We do need 100% attendance for the last few meetings, but by then all the school sports and clubs should have their seasons wrapped up, so there should be no conflict.

Homework

The work we do to prepare for the tour is essential.

We write our own guide book, so each student is required to research and write 5-6 articles throughout the year to submit for that book.

Additionally, we read a number of books about our destination country throughout the school year. At each of our meetings we will take time to discuss these books, so each student should have read them and be prepared to talk about how they fit with the places we're going.

If there are students who are not submitting articles or reading the assigned books, the TAP teachers will have to sit down and talk with them and their parents about their commitment to the program and whether or not they should continue.

TAP Mentors

TAP Mentors are students that have gone on a trip with us before and are returning for the second (or third) time. They will assist the teachers in preparing the 8th graders for the tour. Mentors have experience with culture shock, foreign foods, airline travel, packing suitcases, and surviving away from home. They are an invaluable resource to both the teachers and the 8th graders.

Passports

- *You need one.*
- *Get one.*
- *They sometimes take 8-10 weeks to arrive, so act now...*
- *We need a copy of it ASAP. Bring a copy to one of the meetings (or bring the passport and we'll copy it for you). By having copies of the passports, we make it easier to replace any if one happens to get lost.*
- *Your name on the passport and the name you enrolled with EF with have to match (including middle name). Please check with EF to make sure they do.*
- *Students will not hold passports during the trip. We collect their passports the morning we depart for the airport.*
- *If a parent is traveling with their student, the parent may hold the passport if they wish.*
- *We're not going to hold the grown-ups' passports. You're a grown-up. You hold it.*

Responsibilities of an Adult Traveler

Our adult travelers have paid to go on a vacation of sorts. You should be focused on having a fantastic time, but we do ask you to follow these simple guidelines:

- *Help keep the group safe*
- *Be on time for all activities, departures, and meals*
- *Have fun*
- *Tip appropriately*
- *Act as a deputy for the teachers (they're the sheriffs)*
- *Feel free to take your son/daughter off on your own. You will not be allowed to take other kids with you.*
- *Understand that the teachers are responsible for the entire group, and all decisions will be made with the group in mind.*

- *Understand that the teachers have been entrusted by all the other parents to make the right decision for their kids. This is not a responsibility the teachers take lightly, so please respect their experience and wisdom to make the right choices.*
- *Remember, you are on an educational tour designed for 14 year olds.*

In Case of Emergency

Of course, we hope no emergencies pop up, but we try to be prepared if something does happen.

Since our students will not be carrying their passports with them, we ask that parents get them an Illinois State ID Card from the DMV that they can keep with them while traveling.

Before we leave, TAP will need to have the following documents on file:

- *A copy of the traveler's passport*
- *TAP's medical form including all prescription medication and allergy information*
- *TAP's emergency contact form*
- *TAP's photo release form*
- *A copy of your insurance card*

For the sake of peace of mind, please know that most of the TAP teachers are CPR and first aid certified and have contact with EF offices all over the world at all times.

Logistics

Departure dates and times will be set about 60 days before travel. Until then, they may fluctuate a few days in either direction of our requested departure dates. We will generally get an overnight flight with a layover in another city. EF finds the cheapest flights for us. In the past we've flown Air France, Delta, Lufthansa, American Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, and British Airways.

Hotel information will be available about 30 days before departure. When it is available, TAP will distribute hotel addresses, phone numbers, and websites to all families.

All payments are made through EF Tours. Minooka TAP has nothing to do with fees, prices, cancellations, or anything money related (outside of tipping, currency exchanges, and fund raising).

Before departure, TAP needs to have a photo release form on file for each student so that we can update our website and Facebook while overseas.

Packing

What to Wear on the Plane

Comfort is key. We're going to be on a bus to the airport, then we'll wait in the terminal for a while, then there's a loooooooooooooooooong plane ride, followed by more waiting, maybe another plane, another bus... You need to be dressed for comfort for the long haul and different climates.

We suggest:

- *Long pants – khakis, sweats, track pants... It may be June when we leave, but airports and airplanes can be chilly. Let's be prepared.*
- *A t-shirt of some sort (If you have a TAP t-shirt, that would be a great one to wear to the airport, so we stand out as a group).*
- *A sweater, sweatshirt, or hoodie – you don't have to wear it, but we'd like you to have it handy just in case.*
- *Socks.*
- *Tennis shoes – we will be walking. You will not be allowed to get on the bus to the airport without tennis shoes on.*

Your Backpack for the Plane Ride

Think of this backpack as your survival kit. What are you bringing with that you need for the first two days in case something happens to our luggage? Be prepared for anything. Once we get settled in the first hotel, you can move a lot of this stuff into your regular suitcase and not carry it everywhere.

CLOTHES

- *A light jacket*
- *A sweatshirt or hoodie*
- *A few extra pairs of socks*
- *A few extra pairs of underwear (put the socks and underwear together in a big Ziploc bag)*
- *A hat*
- *Slippers, slipper socks, or flip flops (if you want, for comfort on the plane)*
- *Sunglasses*

TOILETRIES PACK #1

All of these items need to be put into one quart sized Ziploc bag. Each item must be in bottles of 3 ounces or less.

- *Toothpaste*
- *Deodorant*
- *Shampoo/conditioner*

- *Hand sanitizer*
- *Contact lens solution (if needed)*
- *Sunscreen*
- *Hair product (if needed)*
- *Chapstick or lip balm (it gets really dry in planes and in a lot of the hotels)*

TOILETRIES PACK #2

These items can be in a different Ziploc bag. Since they are not gel or liquid, size is not an issue, but pack them together to keep things simple and organized.

- *Gum*
- *Cough drops*
- *Pain medicine like Aspirin or Ibuprofen*
- *Band-aids*
- *Any prescription medicine you need*

ENTERTAINMENT

Many of us also pack these items together in a smaller bag so that you can stuff the entire backpack in the overhead bin, but have a smaller bag with these items with you in your seat.

- *A book*
- *Magazines*
- *Your journal and a pen (you'll need the pen for the international arrival card too)*
- *Puzzle books*
- *Playing card*
- *iPod and headphones*

OTHER STUFF YOU MAY WANT IN YOUR BACKPACK

We recommend keeping things together in Ziploc bags with other similar items to make things simpler and easier to find (for example – put your iPod charger, your phone charger, and your headphones in the same bag).

- *Camera*
- *Camera charger or extra batteries*
- *Phone*
- *Phone charger*
- *Wallet (we recommend a travel wallet)*
- *Money*
- *Phone cards*
- *ATM or credit cards*
- *Adapter/Converter for foreign plugs*
- *iPod charger*
- *Healthy snacks – granola bars, trail mix, dried fruit, cereal bars, nuts...*
- *A small pack of wet wipes*
- *Extra Ziploc bags*
- *A small flashlight (with extra batteries)*
- *A small rain poncho (the 99 cent ones in the camping section of the store are perfect)*

Your Suitcase

Keep in mind that 50% of travelers have a large black rolling suitcase. If this is the case for you, don't go out and buy a new one, just do something to distinguish your bag from other peoples' luggage. Tie a ribbon around the handle, put a big sticker on the front of it, wrap a bungee cord or a colorful strap around the case...

Also keep in mind there are going to be times that you'll need to lug that thing up three or four flights of stairs, then back down again a few hours later. You're going to need to roll it or carry it through at least two airports, to the bus, and up and down/in and out of hotels all week. What we're trying to say is ----- PACK LIGHT!

Your suitcase has to be under 50 lbs. For every ounce over 50 lbs, the airline will charge you a fee. Remember that you will be bringing home souvenirs, so when you leave Minooka, you'll want your suitcase to be waaaaaay underweight. We want it under 35 lbs. Minooka TAP will not pay any over the weight limit fees. Those are on you.

CLOTHES

- *Shirts – bring enough t-shirts (or light weight summer shirts) to last the whole trip. That's 12-14 days. We'd suggest 15-17 shirts or 2-3 more than the number of days on the trip – you never know if you might spill, get extra sweaty, or get caught in the rain.*
- *A couple of long sleeve shirts. (We often wear a long sleeve shirt even on a hot summer day, just to protect our skin and avoid sunburn). If you're wearing the long sleeves on top of the t-shirts, you can re-wear them a few times – it's not gross, it's practical –welcome to the world of international travel.*
- *Tank tops – If you want to wear them, that's fine, but you'll have to cover your shoulders in religious buildings, so have a sleeved shirt with you at all times to put on over it. Straps must be 2 inches wide (no spaghetti straps).*
- *Sweatshirts/Hoodies – Even though we travel in June, you probably need one or two of these (more if we're traveling to the Southern Hemisphere). You want to be prepared for cold weather, especially in the evenings, in the mountains, or underground.*
- *Jeans/Pants – They take up a ton of space and are very heavy. Do not bring 12 pairs of jeans with – you can re-wear a pair of jeans 4-5 times on a trip.*
- *Shorts/Capris – Your shorts need to be long enough that they'd pass school dress code. Again, this is about respect for other cultures and their customs.*
- *One nice outfit – Just in case.*
- *Shoes – only gym shoes are allowed on excursions.*
- *Sandals/Flip Flops/Slippers – those are fine for the hotel (you will not walk around the hotel hallways or lobby in your socks or barefeet)*
- *Sleepwear*
- *Warm hats/gloves – just in case it's colder than we expected*
- *Ball caps – these are fine except in religious buildings*
- *Socks – bring enough that I don't have to smell your stanky feet*
- *Underwear – you know what you need.*

TOILETRIES

- *Toothbrush*
- *Toothpaste*
- *Mouthwash*
- *Floss*
- *Shampoo*
- *Soap*
- *Conditioner*
- *Deodorant*
- *Hair product*
- *Sunscreen*
- *Contact lens stuff*
- *Feminine products*
- *Medicines (you should be prepared for tummy issues, headaches, sore throats, or any other minor ailment you can think of)*
- *Hair dryer or straightener (work out with other girls who can bring what so you can share these items)*

OTHER STUFF YOU MIGHT WANT IN YOUR SUITCASE

- *Books or e-reader*
- *Batteries*
- *Film*
- *Extra memory cards*
- *Voltage adapter/converter*
- *Playing cards/travel games*
- *Pens/pencils*
- *A small umbrella*

Your Backpack Once We're There

Once we get settled in the first hotel, we'll rearrange our stuff so that our backpack is much lighter and easier to carry. Do not carry unnecessary things with you in your backpack all day.

This is what you should have with you at all times:

- *A hoodie or jacket (not only to keep you warm when needed, but makes an awesome pillow on the bus)*
- *Pens and your journal book*
- *Camera (along with film, memory cards, or batteries)*
- *Wallet (along with ATM/credit cards, money, and phone cards)*
- *Hand Sanitizer*
- *Sunscreen and lip balm (seriously, we cannot stress these enough)*
- *Phone*
- *Mini First Aid kit (band aids, cough drops, aspirin, tummy medicine, saline for contacts...)*
- *Your filtered water bottle*

WHAT YOU DO NOT NEED

Do not pack the following items. They will not be needed. You paid (or your parents paid) for this trip to get a cultural experience, see the world, and learn something. These items will be taken from you if you're too stubborn to listen to this warning.

- DVD players
- Computers
- Video games
- Anything else that common sense is telling you to leave at home.

If expensive items like these are brought and lost, Mincooka TAP and the teachers involved in the program are not responsible for them.

The Final Word

You are about to take part in an incredible experience that not many kids your age get to be a part of. The rules and guidelines in this packet are not designed to make it harder, stricter, or worse – they are things the TAP teachers have thought carefully about for years and years now. They are here to make sure that you and your classmates are safe, that you learn tons, and that you have loads and loads of fun on this adventure.

Follow each part of this packet carefully, and we will guarantee that you'll have one of the greatest adventures you've ever had – one you'll be talking about for the rest of your life.

Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

Mark Twain

Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.

Mariam Beard

I am not the same having seen the moon shine on the other side of the world.

Mary Anne Radmacher

One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.

Henry Miller

*To move, to breathe, to fly, to float,
To gain all while you give,
To roam the roads of lands remote,
To travel is to live.*

Hans Christian Andersen