“Language and Culture in the Amazon”
Orientation Guide
Fall 2007

http://web.pdx.edu/~wubbold/Amazon/
Table of Contents

Pre-Departure Orientation
  Health
  Suggested Packing List
  Financial Preparation

In-Country Orientation
  Cultural Shock
  Traveling as a Large Group
  Housing
  Health
  Safety & Security
  Communication with Family & Friends Back Home

Informational Websites
Pre-Departure Orientation

The goal of this section is to provide Language and Culture in the Amazon participants with all of the information needed to prepare to have a successful experience in Peru. This section will cover pre-departure health care matters, suggested packing list, and financial preparation.

Health

- **Travel Insurance.** Students in this course are covered by health insurance that is included in their program fee. Before we travel you will receive information about this insurance, should you need medical care in Peru it will be provided for you and you will pay for the service. You will receive a receipt which you will submit to the insurance company for reimbursement upon your return.

- **Recommended Vaccinations and Preventative Medications.** The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following immunizations and preventative medications before traveling to Peru:
  - Hepatitis A
  - Hepatitis B
  - Rabies
  - Typhoid
  - Tetanus-Diphtheria and Measles (Check with your health care provider to find out if you are due to receive booster doses of these vaccinations).
  - Anti-malarial drugs (Talk with your health care provider to discuss the pros and cons of taking anti-malarial medications. According to the CDC, only rural areas at altitudes lower than 1,500 meters (4,921 feet) pose a risk for malaria.

Portland State University’s Center for Student Health & Counseling is also another option. The Center offers the Immunization and International Travel Clinic. Please see below for contact information at the PSU Travel Clinic.

Al Torres, MD
2220 NW Pettygrove St.
Portland, OR 97210
**Phone:** 503-224-0103
**Hours:** 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Monday and Friday
8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday
**Fees:** No Charge for the office visit.
Immunizations: There is an additional fee for each immunization. Payment needs to be cash or check only.

Visit the Center for Student Health and Counseling website http://www.shac.pdx.edu/community/travelclinics.php for other travel clinics in Portland.
• **Caring for Yourself Pre-departure.** Taking caring of yourself before departing for any study abroad program is extremely important. Your body will experience a great deal of physical, emotional, and mental shock upon arriving to a new country. Keep in mind that this program involves waking up between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m., experiencing significant altitude changes during travel to the rural schools, eating new and unknown foods, adjusting your comfort level, and experiencing culture shock. Thus, it is important to be healthy before leaving. Build up your immune system by getting plenty of rest, taking your vitamins, and caring for yourself in general from now until departure.

**Suggested Packing List**

Below is a list of some items that students will find useful during their stay in Peru. This list is not comprehensive; however, it includes items that students may not have thought to bring.

- Important Travel Documents: Passport, two copies of passport (Place one in luggage separate from your passport and give the other to Mark Wubbold pre-departure. You may want to consider leaving a copy of it with a family member back home), another form of identification, and all forms of money—see below under financial preparation).
- Money belt (I recommend one that fits low inside of your pants.)
- Rain jacket
- Medium thickness sweater or light jacket
- Tennis shoes, sneakers, or light hiking books (Waterproof, if possible)
- Comfortable sandals (Tevas, Chacos, Reefs, etc.)
- Flip-flops (You will want to have light flip-flops that dry quickly for use in the shower.)
- Towel (A travel towel might be best so that it dries quickly and packs smaller.)
- Sun Block (Please bring sun block because sun here is strong…especially use it daily on your face.)
- Hat or sun visor (Like I said the sun can get you)
- Bug repellent
- Hand sanitizer
- Bathing suit or trunks
- Leak proof water bottle
- Daypack or small backpack (You will want to have something small to use during the day trips.)
- Travel alarm clock (We will be leaving early each morning so it would be wise to bring one.)
- Travel flashlight
- Jeans (Bring at least one pair of jeans.)
- Light clothes
- Nice outfit.
If you forget anything of great importance, don’t worry…you can get just about anything in Iquitos!

**Financial Preparation**

Arranging your finances pre-departure will make your experience in Peru less stressful. Below are suggested steps to take before leaving for the program.

- **Contact your bank(s) before leaving to alert them to your travel plans.** Most banks have anti-fraud departments that monitor debit card and credit card accounts for suspicious activity. These departments often consider purchases made in foreign countries as suspicious. Thus, notifying the banks about your travel plans will help prevent extremely inconvenient account freezes.

- **Bring an ATM/Debit Card & an Alternate Credit Card.** ATM machines are readily available in Iquitos.

  It is a good idea to have an alternate credit card and/or debit card in the event that your primary card does not work for whatever reason. Also, find out your PIN number for your credit card if the need arose for you to take cash directly from the card in an emergency. Another option if ATM machines were out of service is to obtain a cash advance in a bank or a travel agency using your debit card or credit.

  ***Please note that it is much easier to have an ATM card that serves as a debit card (a.k.a. has the Visa or Mastercard logo). If you do not have such an ATM card, check with your bank to find out how to obtain one.

- **Make a master list of emergency contact numbers, emails, and websites for your ATM/Debit/Credit cards.** In the unfortunate event that your cards are lost or stolen, having a list of phone numbers, emails, and websites for your banks or credit card companies will make card cancellation much easier. Keep this list separate from your cards and consider leaving a copy of this contact list with a family member.

- **Current Exchange Rate (Subject to Change) See**

  1 US Dollar = 3.03771 Peruvian Nuevo Sol
  1 Peruvian Nuevo Sol (PEN) = 0.32920 US Dollar (USD)

**In-Country Orientation**

The goal of this section is to provide you with important information needed to help participants understand and adjust to their experience once in Peru. This section will cover culture shock, housing and communication with family and friends back home.

**Culture Shock**

Travelers to another country will inevitably experience culture shock. You will experience it in Peru even if only going for a two-week period. However, the key to overcoming it,
embracing it, and growing from it is to recognize the phases of culture shock and to seek the support that you need from fellow participants and even Peruvian friends of the program.

Please keep in mind that culture shock often signifies “a negative attitude” towards everything about a particular country. This negative attitude usually includes complaining, whining, and being irritable with others. We encourage students to avoid dwelling on the negative aspects of their experience and focus on the positive. Try to avoid large group “complaining sessions” because this usually does not resolve the feelings that students are experiencing because of culture shock. Of course, talking through your feelings is an excellent way to sort them out, but attempt to do so with a positive approach. The program only lasts for two weeks. Make the most of the experience.

Below are the four stages of culture shock and their symptoms. Take some time to understand these stages and brainstorm ways in which you will cope positively with them.

According to the author of "Survival Kit for Overseas Living" Robert L. Kohls, provides the following as the four main stages of culture shock:

1. Initial Euphoria
2. Irritability and Hostility
3. Gradual Adjustment
4. Adaptation or Biculturalism

The overall symptoms of intercultural adjustment, usually experienced during the second stage, are anxiety, homesickness, helplessness, boredom, depression, fatigue, confusion, self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, unexplained fits of weeping, physical ailments and psychosomatic illnesses.

Some of the required course readings will include articles and excerpts from books that address culture shock. The course syllabus will provide the names of these readings.

Below is a list of resources about culture shock and how to handle it in an effective way.


**Traveling As a Group**

This program requires traveling as a group on a daily basis, which entails being very conspicuous. Traveling as a group demands a great deal of patience, flexibility, and mutual respect. Unexpected events tend to happen when a large number of people travel together. Thus, patience and flexibility will help students avoid being frustrated when plans change or the group has to wait. Mutual respect is also a key to maintaining harmony among people
who are traveling in a large group. Punctuality is part of mutual respect. Keep in mind that making the entire group wait is not only disrespectful, but also irresponsible. In general, taking a trip with a large group requires a collectivistic approach rather than an individualistic one to travel. We are all in this together.

**Housing**

Students will share their room with one or two other program participants. Every student will have his or her own bed.

Please note that Peruvian sewerage systems cannot handle a great deal of use. Therefore, always place used toilet paper in the garbage can. Do not flush it down the toilet. Sleeping accommodations include a clean bed, clean sheets each week, and a secure bedroom. If a student feels that their accommodations do not meet these standards, contact Mark Wubbold immediately to resolve the issue.

**Health**

Maintaining good health while in Peru requires keeping your immune system strong, taking precautions to avoid stomach ailments, and taking care of yourself if you do get a stomach bug or other illness. This section will provide information on how to maintain good health while in Peru.

- **Health Tips**
  - Rest, rest, rest. Get plenty of sleep each night. This is crucial. The combination of culture shock, early morning departures, and changes in altitudes, foods, and overall comfort levels will tax the body greatly. Be kind to yourself and get lots of sleep every night.
  - Wash hands frequently. If this is not possible such as when we will be in the schools, use hand sanitizer. This will be the best prevention of stomach bugs.
  - Drink only purified water. Do not drink from the tap. Do not drink beverages prepared by street vendors.
  - Brush teeth with purified water.
  - Make sure that dishes are dry before using them. One way to get sick is to use wet dishes that have been washed in regular tap water. Drying dishes completely eliminates the possibility of catching a bug from the drops of tap water left on the dishes.
  - Be careful with vegetables. In restaurants look for a statement in the menu that says something like “All vegetables have been disinfected.” When in doubt, ask about it or just do not eat it.
  - Be discriminating in choosing street food. Look to see if the meat looks like it has been sitting for a while. Make sure that the food has just come out of the vat of grease in the case of fried chicken or off the grill for tacos.
• Cut up fruit is okay. It is a delicious and cheap snack. One word of caution: check to make sure the person cutting the fruit cleans the knife in a sanitary way.

• What Happens if I Get Sick? Sickness is often a common part of travel to developing countries such as Peru. Please keep in mind that most people will experience adjustments in their bowel movements because of changes in food. This does not signify a stomach infection, but rather an adjustment. Drink lots of water and avoid greasy food. Usually the adjustment will pass or you will just have unusual bowel movements for three week. In any event, it might be a slight inconvenience, but nothing to worry about. However, a real bug can strike. An actual stomach infection can have a range of symptoms. Most infections involve severe vomiting, diarrhea, possible fever, lethargy, etc. If it does hit you, help is available. Below are some steps to take to ensure students receive the care they need in the event of a stomach illness.

• Contact someone from the Language and Culture in the Amazon leadership team immediately. Have a fellow program participant do this if you are unable to do so.
• Drink lots of fluids. The key to overcoming any stomach infection is to stay hydrated. Drinking small amounts at a time is an effective way to avoid dehydration.
• Sleep. Getting plenty of rest is one of the best ways to overcome any illness.
• Do not panic. Stomach infections will pass. In addition, we have a doctor on call at all hours of the day and night if the need arises. Furthermore, there are several pharmacies that understand the needs of foreign students. The leadership team is here to help. Students should never feel alone or helpless when they are sick.

Safety & Security

The U.S. Department of State travel warnings about Peru are real and valid. Students should take these into consideration and understand that in many ways Peru can be dangerous. However, just like in the U.S. crime happens, and we can prevent a great deal of it by being aware and cautious. This section will provide tips on how students can be avoid being victims of crime and how to react in the event that they are victimized.

• Carry money in separate places on your body. If you are pick pocketed or robbed, at least you can try to avoid losing all of your money and other valuables.
• Carry all important documents on your body if traveling on public transportation. Do not leave your passport or other important documents in your backpack away from you. In general, avoid carrying large sums of money or important documents when on day trips. Leave them in your room in a safe place. As a group, we may travel by public transportation and if you stay longer you most certainly will, when
you do, take precautions. Try to always hold your bags on your lap. This is not
always feasible, but try to at least keep an eye on them at all times.

- At night in Iquitos, the areas around our accommodations are safe. However, some
  of the back roads may not be. Use commonsense and do not find yourself alone at
  night. In general, use the buddy system when out and about.
- If someone by chance robs you with a weapon, please do not resist. Stay calm and
give them your stuff. It is not worth it. It is unfortunate to lose your valuables, but it
would be much worse to get injured or lose your life over a few soles.

Communication with Families & Friends Back Home

Iquitos has numerous cafes that offer access to the Internet and phone calls to the United
States for reasonable prices. Many pharmacies offer international phone call services for
approximately (26-39 cents/minute) Thus, communication via email and telephone is readily
available in Iquitos.

Informational Websites

- U.S. Department of State: http://www.travel.state.gov/
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov