

Navigating the holiday season as an international student  
International students share what helps through the holidays  
How UMD is a home away from home for International students during the holidays.  
Not all students are able to go home during the holidays; here are some ways they embrace festivities while studying across the sea.

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Words:

Flavia Batista is no stranger to spending the holidays away from her family.

She grew up in Brazil where she attended undergraduate school before getting her masters in Illinois. She then decided to attend the University of Maryland, where she has been for the past three years working to obtain her doctorate in government and politics.<sup>1</sup>

The first year Batista spent away from her home during the holidays was challenging, especially with her January birthday that followed shortly after. One of the biggest things that got her through the difficult time was the community she built with other international students.<sup>2</sup>

Batista advises those who can't travel home during breaks to organize something with friends — whether that be other international students or people from Maryland who will be in the area.<sup>3</sup> “Just be together with the people you like here,” Batista said. “It's gonna make this moment a little bit less challenging.”<sup>4</sup>

Junior mechanical engineering major Nelson Barboza also advises students who can't leave campus during break to form reliable connections. Barboza has the opportunity to travel to his home in Venezuela during the holidays, but said there's people who care about him at this university that wouldn't let him be alone if he had to stay.<sup>5</sup>

“I would advise creating good and deep connections with people you trust,” Barboza said. “If you have any family members here, go to them. If not, try to go to a friend you make here.”

Although there are opportunities for international students at this university to find community, others prefer to dive into their work during the holiday season.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?utm_source=copy_url) 1:04-

<sup>2</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?tab=chat](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?tab=chat) 4:13- 4:48

<sup>3</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?tab=chat](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?tab=chat) 5:41-7:03

<sup>4</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?utm_source=copy_url) 7:27

<sup>5</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/OqukJ3okUdwyHLhz-IKjIVkmRQk?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/OqukJ3okUdwyHLhz-IKjIVkmRQk?utm_source=copy_url)

One of the ways first-year graduate student Dominic Thirshatha Thirukumar deals with being away for the holidays by keeping himself occupied, whether through school work or exploring the area with friends. <sup>6</sup>

Thirukumar admitted that staying behind while his friends went home for Thanksgiving was tough, but after a few days of feeling alone, he was able to distract himself. <sup>7</sup>

“I had homework and assignments to keep myself busy,” Thirukumar said. “And after that, when I went to the shopping [mall], I really felt okay. I was really good.”<sup>8</sup>

He advises other international students struggling with loneliness to stay busy,<sup>9</sup> which could mean dedicating time to schoolwork, making extra money at a campus job or exploring other states. Thirukumar is taking his own advice for the upcoming winter break and plans to travel to Florida to visit friends. <sup>10</sup>

Technological features such as FaceTime and Zoom can also make it easier to connect with family and friends over long distances.

Despite being away from home during the break, Batista still got to be apart of her family photo by joining a video chat on her phone.<sup>11</sup>

“It is sad not to be there, but at least it is a memory that you're creating with them,” Batista said.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/ONlqHlsdaRFbGM5u0y0LVFcuJLU?tab=chat> 3:54- shopping in Virginia

<sup>7</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/ONlqHlsdaRFbGM5u0y0LVFcuJLU?tab=chat> 3:54

<sup>8</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/ONlqHlsdaRFbGM5u0y0LVFcuJLU?tab=chat> 4:57-5:04

<sup>9</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/ONlqHlsdaRFbGM5u0y0LVFcuJLU?tab=chat> 5:15

<sup>10</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/ONlqHlsdaRFbGM5u0y0LVFcuJLU?tab=chat> 5:38

<sup>11</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?tab=chat](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?tab=chat) 7:52

<sup>12</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?utm_source=copy_url) 8:08-8:14

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utilizes these features often, allowing her to celebrate with her loved ones. She  
nd made it a lot easier for her to cope.

In a perfect world every student would be able to spend the holidays at home or, at least with their families. Unfortunately for some international students thousands of miles away from familiarity this is not a reality.

has made more of an effort to spend the break with her family, not thinking twice about going home since the pandemic. However, she recognizes that flying overseas is expensive, and

While the campus is quieter than usual during the lengthy winter break, many international students are determined to make the most of their time across the seas. From exploring the country to visiting new friends, they are finding ways to enjoy the holidays away from home.

### **Celebrating with a new communit**

The festive season is a time to spend with loved ones, which can also mean celebrating with new friends.

Batista also mentions that even though Thanksgiving is not celebrated in Brazil, the three days most students spend at home for this shorter break can be lonely if traveling is not a possibility.

One of the things that helps her cope is the annual friendsgiving she has with the rest of her small 10 person government and politics cohort.<sup>13</sup>

who were struggling with the same situation

One of the biggest perks of attending such a large school is the extensive resources available for students to explore. **This university** is no exception with organizations like International Student & Scholar Service (ISS) and Graduate Student Government (GSG) providing a support outlet for both undergraduate and graduate international students.

ISSS is specifically geared towards creating a welcoming environment for international students that allows them to transition smoothly and make connections on campus. They host events such as International Coffee Hours that allow students to connect with one another.

<sup>14</sup>Second year master's student, Saleel Anthrathodiyil, is a part of a new GSG external committee that serves as an international graduate student advisory board under the Office of International Affairs which is another resource to explore.<sup>15</sup>

Saleel Anthrathodiyil, an international engineering master's student from India, said that students should take advantage of the community-building activities that the graduate student government provides.

**Spaces and support outlets can also be found in organizations such as the International Student & Scholar Service and the Graduate Student Government. Events like International Coffee Hour provide a space for connection among international students.**<sup>16</sup>

Saleel Anthrathodiyil, a master's student, is a part of a new GSG external committee that serves as an international graduate student advisory board under this university's office of international affairs. He said that **although GSG doesn't** have a lot of holiday specific events, students should take advantage of the community building activities they provide during the semester.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/fUIE\\_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B\\_8?tab=chat](https://otter.ai/u/fUIE_WQ92yoaeT3c1W5XN7i9B_8?tab=chat) 9:09

<sup>14</sup> <https://marylandglobal.umd.edu/global-learning-all/international-students-scholars>

<sup>15</sup> <https://otter.ai/u/H25rqFIP-TTQEHHz7DM2QQaUFz8?tab=chat> 3:00

<sup>16</sup> <https://marylandglobal.umd.edu/global-learning-all/international-students-scholars>  
<https://marylandglobal.umd.edu/about/events/event-calendar/international-coffee-hour-4>

Anthrathodiyil is also currently the Vice President of Financial Affairs and Student Fee Matters of GSG<sup>17</sup> and admits that even though they don't have a lot of holiday specific events, students should take advantage of the community building activities they provide during the semester.

Him and his roommate went on a shopping trip in Virginia, which helped him feel a lot better about his situation. <sup>18</sup>

“If you have any family members here, go to them. If not, try to go to a friend you make here.”- Barboza said.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gsgumd.org/>

<sup>18</sup> [https://otter.ai/u/H25rqFIP-TTQEHHz7DM2QQaUFz8?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/H25rqFIP-TTQEHHz7DM2QQaUFz8?utm_source=copy_url) 6:14-6:26