



## WELCOME!

To help you prepare for your upcoming study abroad experience, we have put together this handbook to answer some of your questions about the program and life in Florence. We recommend that you do the following:

- Read all the information thoroughly.
- Refer to all websites cited in the handbook.
- Take the handbook with you when you travel.

If your questions are not answered by the handbook, then please do not hesitate to contact us.

### Your contacts at AIFS:

**In Stamford, Connecticut, for application, billing, flight and general questions:**

**Tel:** (800) 727-2437

**Fax:** (203) 399-5597

**E-mail:** [aifspartnerships@aifs.com](mailto:aifspartnerships@aifs.com)

**In Florence, for site-specific questions and roommate requests:**

[florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:florence@aifs.co.uk)

### Your Team In Florence

#### AIFS Student Services

Piazza dei Peruzzi 1

50122

Firenze

**Tel:** (+39) 055 2399 236

**Email:** [florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:florence@aifs.co.uk)

*Student services coordinate all aspects of the program including housing and social and cultural activities.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEFORE YOU GO!.....	2
EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION .....	2
PASSPORT & VISA INFORMATION.....	3
IMMUNIZATION AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS.....	5
MONEY .....	5
BUDGETING & SPENDING MONEY .....	6
BAGGAGE TIPS .....	7
WHAT TO PACK.....	9
EUROPEAN TOURIST OFFICES .....	11
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC) ...	11
PERSONAL SAFETY ABROAD .....	11
DRUG ARREST .....	12
LEGAL AID.....	12
CULTURE SHOCK .....	13
ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS .....	14
IN FLORENCE .....	15
GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO CITY CENTER .....	15
ORIENTATION.....	16
HOUSING AND MEALS.....	16
COMMUNICATIONS.....	17
ACADEMIC LIFE.....	18
COMPUTERS .....	18
TRAVEL .....	18
HEALTH & MEDICAL CARE .....	19
CLIMATE.....	19
ELECTRICITY .....	19
SPORTS .....	19
Q & A.....	20

## BEFORE YOU GO!

### To do list:

- Apply for or renew your passport if necessary
- Apply for a visa if necessary (see page 3)
- See your physician and complete the Medical Exam Form (see page 4)
- Order enough medication to last entire stay abroad
- Visit the U.S. Department of State's website for Students going abroad:  
<http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>
- Sign up for The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). It is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens/nationals who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country:  
<https://step.state.gov/step/>
- Consult baggage allowance guidelines
- Start planning what to pack
- Buy a useful guidebook
- Notify your bank if you are planning to use your card abroad so it is not blocked
- Contact your cell phone provider for information about using your cell abroad, as it may be better to buy one abroad (see the Communications Abroad section)
- Give contact details or a copy of this handbook to your family, friends and/or guardians

## EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

### EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

#### Contact from U.S.

AIFS has a worldwide communications network and is ready to respond when family or medical emergencies arise. An emergency officer is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Upon arrival in Florence, students are given an emergency phone number to contact a staff member in the event of an emergency outside of office hours. In the event of an emergency in which a relative from the U.S. needs to contact you in Florence, they should call AIFS at (800) 727-2437. During non-business hours, they will be connected to the AIFS Emergency Answering Service.**

#### Contact in Florence

In case of emergency or if you need to contact an AIFS representative for a serious reason, you can call the following AIFS Emergency Number:

#### Calling from Florence

340 836 5089

#### Calling from the U.S.

011 39 340 836 5089

#### Medical Emergency

In case of serious medical emergency, students should call

AXA Assistance at:

**(312)-935-1703** (calling from outside of the US, collect calls accepted)

or **(855)-327-1411** (calling toll-free from within the US)

Please quote: Policy **GLM N04983117**

Always remember to inform the Florence staff first about your sickness and to keep all receipts from your doctor's appointment plus any prescriptions in order to fill out the insurance claim form.

#### Emergency numbers in Florence

<b>Police</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Ambulance</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Fire</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Emergencies</b>	<b>113</b>

# PREPARING TO LEAVE

## PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION

### PASSPORTS

Students planning to study abroad need a valid passport for the duration of their stay overseas. **If you have a passport that is scheduled to expire during your program or within three months after the end of your program, renew it now. Do not delay!**

If you are applying for your first passport, you must present in person a completed Form DS-11, "Application for a U.S. Passport" at one of the several thousand Federal and State courts and U.S. post offices that accept passport applications. Check with those closest to your home. If they do not accept the applications, they will be able to recommend a place in your area that does.

To obtain a passport you will need:

- I. Completed Form DS-11: Application for a U.S. Passport
- II. Proof of Citizenship, including:
  - A. Previously issued passport or one in which you were included (e.g. family passport). If you are applying for your first passport or cannot submit a previous passport, you must submit other evidence of citizenship.
  - B. If you were born within the United States: A birth certificate that must show the birth record was filed shortly after your birth and which must be certified with the registrar's signature and raised, embossed or multicolored seal. ("Notifications of Birth Registration" and "Birth Announcements" are not normally accepted for passport purposes.)
  - C. If you were born abroad:
    - i. Certificate of Naturalization
    - ii. Certificate of Citizenship
    - iii. Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. (Form FS-240) or a Certification of Birth (Form DS-1350.)
- III. Identification (One of the following: Previously issued, undamaged U.S. passport; Naturalization Certificate; Valid Driver's License; Current Government ID (city, state or federal); Current Military ID (military and dependents)

IV. Photocopy of the ID you will present when you apply (see above).

V. Two recent identical photographs, taken within the past six months and showing your current appearance. The photos must be 2" x 2" and in color.

For more information on applying for your first passport, visit the State Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/apply.html>.

For more information on renewing your passport, visit [www.travel.state.gov/passport/renew/renew\\_833.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/renew/renew_833.html).

When you receive your passport, be sure to sign it and fill in the personal notification data. If your passport is lost or stolen within the United States, you will need to report the loss or theft immediately to the Passport Services of the Department of State or to the nearest passport agency. You can contact the Passport Services on the toll free numbers (877) 487-2778 or (888) 874-7793. The loss or theft should also be reported to the local police authorities.

For more information, go to the State Department's website: [http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost\\_848.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html).

**IF YOUR PASSPORT IS LOST OR STOLEN WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD, CONTACT THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE CLOSEST AMERICAN CONSULATE AND THE AIFS STAFF IMMEDIATELY.**

### VISAS

A visa is an endorsement stamped into your passport by a foreign government allowing you to enter that particular country for a specific purpose and period of time. Visas are valid from the date on which they are issued.

Every country has its own immigration policies for visitors. Please make sure you have fulfilled all the necessary requirements before your departure. When entering other countries, prepare to be asked to explain why you are there, where you are staying and how long you will stay.

#### Entering Italy – US Citizens

**U.S. citizens staying in Italy for study or tourism purposes for 90 days or less do not require a visa.**

**GENERAL VISA INFORMATION:** Please note that the process of applying for a visa is very time consuming, can be frustrating and does involve extra costs. Allow plenty of time if you wish to get a visa, as it can take several months. The final decision on visas is made by the

individual agent at the consulate. **AIFS will endeavor to send you any paperwork you may need, but we cannot contact or influence the consulate on your behalf, nor can the outcome be guaranteed. Many visa requests are refused.**

AIFS study programs are under 90 days, so you do not need a visa to participate. **Students who wish to extend their stay in Italy or in any of the Schengen countries** (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) **before or after the end of the program and thus exceeding 90 days will need to apply for a tourist visa before they leave.**

U.S. citizens may spend a total of 90 days during any six-month period in the Schengen State as a whole. Those doing both a fall program and spring program in a Schengen country will require a visa.

For additional information concerning visas and entry requirements for Italy, you may contact the Embassy of Italy at:

3000 Whitehaven Street NW, Washington, DC 20008  
Telephone (202) 612-4400

or you may contact the Italian Consulates General in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia or San Francisco, accessible through the Italian Embassy's website:

[http://www.ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_washington/en](http://www.ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/ambasciata_washington/en)

**Please note:** If you plan to stay longer than 90 days, you will need to apply for a visa before departure from the U.S., from the Italian Embassy/Consulate appropriate to your state of residence. Be sure to obtain the necessary paperwork before going to the embassy/consulate.

You will need a passport valid for a period of 3 months beyond your last day of your stay abroad, and the passport must have a blank page on which the visa will be affixed. You will need a letter from your school, on their letterhead, listing all the details of your study abroad program. AIFS is also able to provide you with a letter confirming your participation on the program and the program dates, but we are unable to write a letter regarding your travel before or after the program. You also may need to show a round-trip airline ticket, proof of accommodation reservations during your travels either before or after the program, proof of insurance, proof of sufficient funds and proof of permanent residence in the U.S.

Within eight days of arrival in Italy, you will also need to apply for the "permesso di soggiorno," the permit allowing you to stay in Italy.

If you plan to travel to other countries during breaks or at the end of your study abroad program, it is your responsibility to find out what documentation is necessary for those countries. For more information, visit [http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel\\_1744.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html).

#### **Non-U.S. citizens (i.e. resident aliens, green card holders, etc.):**

If you are not a U.S. citizen, it is your responsibility to obtain all necessary documentation:

1. Check to see if your passport is still valid. If it is not, renew it immediately. You will need a passport valid for a period of 3 months beyond your last day of stay abroad, and the passport must have a blank page on which the visa will be affixed.
2. Contact the embassy in Washington or nearest Consulate of the countries you plan to visit or travel through (e.g. if you have a connecting flight in England) to learn if visas are necessary. Please note that you may require a visa if you are only changing planes in a certain country, even if you will not be exiting the airport.
3. Apply for all necessary visas at once. If you will be visiting only countries that are part of the Schengen Area, you will only need to apply for the Schengen visa. Please be aware that the UK and Ireland are non-Schengen countries and will require different documentation/visas.
4. If you are a permanent resident of the U.S., take your Resident Alien card abroad with you. You will be asked to show it to the U.S. Immigration Officials upon your return to the U.S.
5. Within eight days of arrival in Italy, you may also need to apply for the "permesso di soggiorno," the permit allowing you to stay in Italy. Check with AIFS staff regarding this document.

#### **Registration in Italy**

Within 48 hours of arrival in Italy, all visitors, regardless of the length of their visit, are required to register with the local police and must provide their local address. AIFS handles your registration for you but requires some documentation from you. A photocopy of the information page of your passport (the page with your picture) MUST be submitted to AIFS with your program application or after you've submitted your online enrollment form. If you do not have your passport when you apply for the



program, you must mail a copy to the AIFS Stamford, CT, office as soon as you receive it. If you are unable to do this, you must bring the copy with you and hand it to the AIFS staff at orientation in Florence. There are NO exceptions to this. Failure to do this will mean you are not registered, and that your presence in Italy is illegal.

This necessary registration also means that only those who registered at a specified address are able to stay there, so please arrange for visiting friends and family to stay in hotels, NOT in your apartment.

In addition, students must register with the U.S. authorities before departing the U.S. by going online to the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at <https://step.state.gov/step/>. You will create an account and register yourself directly with the Consulate. Please use the AIFS Florence mailing address found later in this handbook. Additional information will be available on the AIFS portal nearer the departure date.

---

## IMMUNIZATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

Check with your physician or student health service regarding immunization requirements for the countries you plan to visit. A good source of information is <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>. Make sure that childhood immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella; Combined Tdap Vaccine [diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis], etc.) are up-to-date.

Students, particularly those living away from home for the first time, have shown a marked vulnerability to meningitis Group C. As a result, students are strongly encouraged to receive an immunization against both Groups A and C prior to departure from the U.S. Check with your physician for specific details.

Be sure to schedule an appointment for a complete physical examination with your physician prior to departure. The AIFS *Medical Examination Form* found on our portal at [www.aifspartnerships.com](http://www.aifspartnerships.com) **must** be completed by your doctor and returned to AIFS no less than two weeks before you depart.

Use common sense when it comes to your health while you are abroad. The stress of travel and time change combined with a new daily routine can be unsettling at first. Be sure to eat well, drink plenty of fluids and get enough sleep. This will help you get through the adjustment phase at the start of your program. Consider taking a multi-vitamin if you don't normally (be sure to bring some with you).

Always travel with any medications you use on a regular basis, as well as copies of your prescriptions. It is especially

important to have a prescription on hand if you will be carrying insulin, syringes or narcotics. Make sure all medications are carried in their original containers and that your name appears clearly on each label. Be sure you have the generic name of any prescription medication as brand names can vary between countries.

Do not assume that prescriptions can be filled as easily overseas as they can be in the U.S. If possible, bring enough medication to last the entire trip. Those with chronic medical problems should have their physician fully document their case, listing any necessary medications. Carry this documentation with you and be sure to inform the AIFS staff in case there is a problem. It is best not to have medication mailed from the U.S. to Italy as it will be stopped at customs, and you will have to pay for its release.

If you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, be sure to take an extra pair of glasses and a copy of your prescription with you. Contact lens wearers will want to bring their care products (solutions, lens case, eye drops, etc.) with them abroad as the cost of these products is very high overseas. Please do not have contact lenses mailed to you while you are in Italy as they will be stopped at customs, and you will have to pay to have them released.

---

## MONEY

ATM cards credit cards and pre-paid money cards are the safest and simplest ways to carry and obtain money as you will not be able to open a bank account in Florence. Information on various currency options follows. Additional information will be provided closer to departure.

### ATM CARDS

Perhaps the most efficient means of accessing your money is via cash dispenser networks. The *Plus* and *Cirrus* networks can be accessed from several cash machines in Florence, allowing cash to be withdrawn from a U.S. bank account if you have a card that is linked to one of these systems. Students should check with their local bank for ATM capabilities and related costs in Europe. **Before leaving the U.S., make sure you get a four-digit PIN code that does not start with a "0."**

### PRE-PAID CARDS/VISA TRAVEL MONEY

Paper travelers' checks are no longer widely used in Europe. Instead you will find plastic travelers' checks in the form of pre-paid cards such as Visa Travel Money or Cash Passport that you preload then reload as necessary. They work like regular debit/credit cards in that you need a PIN, and they can be obtained in the U.S. before departure. They are a secure way of accessing money overseas, and in the event the prepaid card is lost or

stolen, it can be replaced quickly, wherever you are. However, like normal debit and credit cards, you may still be charged a commission to withdraw money, so check with your bank regarding any such fees.

## CREDIT CARDS

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. VISA and MasterCard are the most widely accepted credit cards in Italy. American Express and Discover Card are less widely accepted. Remember that although credit cards are accepted in most parts of the world, they aren't accepted everywhere. Before entering any establishment where you plan to charge your purchase, be sure that credit cards are accepted.

**ATM and Credit Card Holders:** Inform your bank and card company before departure that you will be spending time abroad. If you do not travel abroad frequently, your bank may occasionally freeze your card if they see purchases that they consider to be out of the ordinary. Forewarn them. Also, if you have a combined checking and savings account, you should place your money in the checking account. Students typically find they cannot access their savings account once outside of the U.S. You will not be able to check recent account activity at the ATM, so be sure you can access your accounts online via your bank's website.

**Cash:** Do not bring U.S. dollars. They will not be accepted at any stores, and if stolen, they cannot be replaced. Additionally, there are no safes in the apartments, and the school cannot keep money for you.

**Personal checks** drawn on U.S. bank accounts are not accepted abroad.

## RECEIVING MONEY FROM THE U.S./EMERGENCY MONEY TRANSFERS

If you need to have money sent to you from the U.S. while studying abroad, the best service to use is Western Union's **MONEY IN MINUTES**. By contacting Western Union you can send money from the U.S. to any Western Union Office worldwide using a U.S. debit or credit card.

You can use this service online at [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com) and click on **MONEY IN MINUTES**. You can also send money over the phone by calling 1-800-CALL-CASH or by visiting any Western Union office.

For more information on this service and transferring money abroad, please visit [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com).

Western Union pick-up locations are found throughout Florence and at any exchange office displaying the Western Union logo.

***Please do not have cash sent to you by mail. It is illegal to do so, and the money most likely will get stolen.***

## HANDLING FOREIGN CURRENCY

- We suggest you do not exchange money if at all possible, but if you must, go to major local banks or to national banks in cities to exchange currency rather than to small banks or money brokers in order to get better rates of exchange. Bureaux de Change give good rates as well.
- Buy a small amount of foreign currency (100 Euros) before departure to have handy upon arrival for taxis and buses. Buy more if you will arrive on a weekend.
- Do not keep a lot of local currency when you depart a country. Exchange it at a bank or at a departure terminal. It may not be easy to exchange foreign currency when you return home, and typically only bills may be exchanged, not coins.
- Don't over-tip. Italians tend to tip less than we do in the U.S. Service may be included so leaving a few coins as a gesture of thanks is appropriate, but there is no need to leave 15-20% of the bill.
- Never exchange your money in hotels, restaurants, bars or shops. They can and will charge high commissions and are not obligated to charge the daily exchange rate.
- Never carry large sums of cash with you. If it is lost or stolen, there is no way to replace it, and it is not covered by insurance.

## BUDGETING AND SPENDING MONEY

Temptations for spending money in Florence (cafés, pastry shops, shopping, museums) are overwhelming, and you should keep this in mind, particularly at the beginning of the program. After a while you will become accustomed to life in Florence and will more easily regulate your expenses. You will need to plan carefully. The AIFS social calendar will provide a range of subsidized activities for your enjoyment.

AIFS recommends students budget \$700-1,000 per month for the basic extras and day-to-day needs. This will not cover extensive personal travel and expensive gift buying. It is advisable to have a credit card in case of unexpected costs.

You know better than anyone else what your spending habits are. Take some time to think about your daily expenses. Ask yourself some of these questions:

Are you used to buying soda out of a machine? Soda machines are scarce in Europe, but sodas are readily available in newsstands on almost every corner (with exchange rates, plan about \$1.60- 3.30 each).

Will you write many letters? Include the cost of postage and stationary. Postcards are very convenient. Use lightweight stationery whenever you can.

#### **Sample menu in Florence:**

Soup/pasta or rice dish.....	€8
Main course.....	€12
Vegetable side dish.....	€5
Wine/Beer.....	€5
Bottled water.....	€3
Ice cream or cake.....	€4
Coffee.....	€2

10% Service charge/Cover charge.....€2

#### **Sample Expenses:**

Pub.....	Beer/Wine- €5	Cocktails- €8
Nightclub entry.....	€6	(€10 with drink)
Non-alcoholic beverage .....	€4	
Hot chocolate or tea in a café.....	€3	
Bottled water from supermarket (1 liter).....	€1	
Laundry.....	€7	per small load

When budgeting, remember to include weekend trips outside the city, any additional cultural and social activities you might want to pursue that are not offered as part of your program, and additional excursions offered at a non-subsidized rate.

***Don't forget the mid-term break, if your program has one. Plan for trips and excursions.***

Plan your budget carefully, and stick to it. As a rule, it's better to bring too much money and not spend it all than not to have enough and miss opportunities. It will also take you a while to get used to how much things cost in Florence, so go slowly with your spending for the first few weeks. It would be a shame to use up all your money

early on and then miss out on opportunities towards the end of the program.

#### **How can I calculate the total cost for the program?**

The program can be divided into four cost areas: AIFS program fee, flight cost, home institution's tuition fee and spending money.

#### **BAGGAGE TIPS**

It is important to use luggage that is durable, easy to pack and easy to carry. Check the handles and seams to make sure they are secure. Soft luggage with zippered openings is lighter and easier to pack than a hard case. You will find backpacks useful to bring for weekend trips. They are easy to carry, and many convert into suitcases.

#### **CHECK YOUR AIRLINE'S WEBSITE CLOSE TO DEPARTURE FOR INFORMATION ON THEIR BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS, AS INFORMATION IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING.**

Do not lock your luggage, even your checked bags. Airport security personnel will remove locks from any bags that require inspection.

#### **Here are some additional tips:**

**Pack only what you can carry.** Bring half of what you think you'll need. Porters are scarce abroad, and luggage carts are prohibited in some parts of the airport, so do not rely on them for assistance. Do not rely on family or friends either — they will not be with you when you arrive at your overseas destination. You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage throughout your journey, until you return home, even if you are on the AIFS flight. You may have to carry your bags some distance in Florence to get to your accommodations, as the buses and taxis may not be able to drop you off directly outside your residence door. ***Expect many stairs within the accommodations, and know that the AIFS staff will not be able to assist with carrying.***

**Pack categorically.** Put clothes, toiletries, maps and guidebooks into separate compartments so you can find them easily. Take along copies of all medical prescriptions, including eyeglasses and/or contact lenses, in case you need a refill.

**Be careful what you pack in your carry-on.** Any liquids, aerosols or gels packed in your carry-on must measure 3.4 oz. or less per container, and all such containers must fit in a quart-sized zip-top clear plastic bag that you will need to present at security. This bag will be screened separately from your luggage, so be sure it is easily accessible. Only one bag is allowed per person. Medications are allowed in

reasonable quantities exceeding 3.4 ounces and do not need to be in a zip-top bag. Declare these items for inspection at the security checkpoint. For the most updated information on packing, as well as airport security, check [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

**Identify your luggage.** Each piece of luggage, including your carry-on, should be identified with a tag showing your name and address at home and abroad (i.e., the address of the school in Florence). Also, put a slip of paper with your name and home address inside your luggage in case your outer tags come off during handling. Always remove old, incorrect address and airline tags to avoid confusion. As an extra precaution, you may want to put a ribbon or a piece of brightly colored tape on your luggage to help you identify it easily in the baggage claim area. If you will be taking the AIFS flight, be sure to use the baggage tags we send you. These make you easier to identify both to the other students on the program and to the AIFS representatives meeting you overseas.

**Never leave your bags unattended at the airport.** Keep an eye on your bags at all times. Airlines will not accept luggage that was not packed by its owner or that was left unguarded.

**Pack a few essentials in your carry-on.** Unfortunately, some students have had to start their study abroad program without their luggage. Just in case the airline should lose your luggage, pack your toothbrush, any medications you need to take, an extra set of underwear, etc., in your carry-on.

Also, if your baggage does go astray en route, file a claim with the airline upon arrival, giving the school address in Florence or the hotel address if you are on the pre-program European tour (if offered by your program). You will receive the hotel address just before departure. Inform your Program Coordinator about the claim; s/he may be able to assist you. Most airlines require that you make your lost luggage claim within four hours after arrival and before you leave the airport.

**Be sure your luggage and its contents are insured against theft or loss.** Personal effects insurance coverage is not included in the AIFS program fee but can be purchased for a supplemental fee. This will give you partial coverage, but please note there are exclusions and per-item limits. Plan to leave expensive or irreplaceable items at home. Refer to the AIFS Insurance Brochure for coverage details.

Alternatively you may wish to arrange your own insurance or extend your existing insurance, especially if you do plan on bringing more expensive items like digital cameras, laptops, etc. Bring receipts for these items with you to

Italy. If you do need to file a claim, you will need to show proof of purchase and purchase price.

*Only students who purchased the AIFS Personal Effects Insurance Coverage have personal effects insurance coverage and may use the Personal Effects Claim Form.*

### **Transatlantic Baggage Regulations**

Airlines flying between the United States and Europe will expect you to follow their regulations concerning baggage allowance. Please study the specifications below and abide by them, but know that your particular airline's regulations may differ. The less you bring, the happier you will be, and the less you will be charged for baggage fees.

International, economy-class baggage restrictions follow. These are general guidelines and may not be specific to your flight. It is always advisable to check with the airline if you have a question. You will be charged a penalty if you exceed the allowance. Please note that these are baggage regulations of the airlines and not of AIFS.

**IMPORTANT: Airline regulations are changing regularly. The information below is only a guide. It is your responsibility to check with the airline and the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) for exact requirements for the dates you will be traveling.**

#### **Checked baggage:**

Most airlines allow 1 piece free of charge, but check with your specific airline to confirm their policies. Most airlines allow a second bag but may charge anywhere from \$150-500. The dimensions (sum of linear measurements: L + H + W) of either piece may not exceed 62 inches. The sum of the two pieces may not exceed 107 inches. Each bag can weigh up to 50 lbs. If your bag(s) exceed this weight limit you will be charged excess baggage fees. For safety reasons, most airlines will refuse to accept bags that weigh more than 70lbs. Consider this when packing, and try to bring as little as possible. Leave space for souvenirs, and remember you will not be able to travel around Europe after the program with that much luggage.

***Note: While traveling within Europe you will be held to a 44 lb/20 kg limit for baggage. Some budget airlines allow even less at 30 lbs/15 kg.***

#### **Carry-on baggage:**

1 piece plus a personal item (laptop, purse, etc.) — Must fit under seat or in overhead compartment. Carry-on luggage may not exceed 55cm (22") x 40cm (16") x 20cm (9") (length, depth, height) including handles, pockets and wheels, or weigh more than 17 lbs.

At the airport it is your responsibility to see that your bags get checked through properly. Make sure your claim stubs have the correct destination on them, and keep them until



you have collected your luggage. These stubs are your receipts. Airlines will refuse luggage that is improperly tagged.

**Put your name and the address of your overseas destination on your baggage tags in case your bags go astray and have to be forwarded to you:**

**AIFS c/o Your Name**

**Piazza dei Peruzzi 1**

**50122 Firenze**

**Italia**

### **European Baggage Regulations**

When flying between countries within Europe (e.g., between Rome and Paris), baggage allowances are extremely restrictive. This will affect anyone who intends to travel before or after an AIFS study abroad program. We advise you to store any excess, bulky luggage items at the storage facilities located at airports and train stations throughout Europe.

***Please note: AIFS does not have baggage storage facilities for students traveling before or after the program.***

Many budget airlines operate in Europe offering no-frills flights at bargain rates. While most of these airlines have similar baggage allowance guidelines (as detailed below), it is always advisable to check restrictions with individual airlines before you travel. You will be charged a penalty if you exceed these allowances. Again, please note that these baggage regulations are enforced by the airlines and not by AIFS.

#### **Checked baggage:**

Most intra-European flights allow a maximum weight of 15-20 kg (33-44 lbs) for any one item of checked baggage and usually allow only one bag per person. Generally, checking heavier bags involves a fee of approximately \$9 per kg.

#### **Carry-on baggage:**

Each passenger can carry one small piece of hand baggage on board. The carry-on bag must not weigh more than 8-10 kg (18-22 lbs), and must measure less than 55cm (21.7") by 40cm (15.7") by 20cm (7.9") in dimension including handles, pockets and wheels.

You must be able to place it comfortably in the carry-on luggage stand located at the check-in desk and gate. If it will not fit, you may be asked to check it and may have to pay extra.

## **WHAT TO PACK**

Deciding what to bring and what to leave behind is a difficult task. Students always find they bring more clothing than is necessary. Bring as little as you possibly can, and try not to bring more than you yourself can carry easily, especially if you plan to travel on your own during or after the program. Closet space in rooms is limited. Remember to leave room for souvenirs and gifts to take back home.

The clothes students wear in Europe are generally the same as those found in the U.S., but you will find that Florentines do dress quite elegantly and tend not to wear sweatpants, sweatshirts, white running shoes or baseball caps around town. However, you may want to bring these items with you in case you want to get involved in any sporting activities while in Florence. Clothing with easy care instructions is advisable, as dry cleaners are very expensive.

During the fall and winter months, you should have a warm coat, boots, gloves and scarf, along with a raincoat, sweaters and comfortable, sturdy shoes, as you will be doing a lot of walking.

In the spring and summer months, the city can get very hot, but the Italians will still dress very elegantly and tend not to have a lot of flesh on display. Italians never wear flip-flops out and about as they are considered indoor wear.

You will probably wear jeans most of the time, but Florentines are careful dressers, and you will probably feel more comfortable at a social or cultural event if you have a few nice outfits. More information will be available on the AIFS portal nearer to the departure date.

Here is a list of clothing and practical items you may want to consider packing. Also listed are clothing and items you should not bring.

### **CLOTHING**

#### **Do bring:**

- Clothing that can be worn in a range of different temperatures and won't require frequent washings. "Mix and match" items that can be worn in layers when it is cold and alone when it is warmer, such as jeans, sweaters and T-shirts (long- and short-sleeved), will be most useful.

*For programs during the fall and winter months, bring:*

- A raincoat and umbrella plus a good winter jacket that will provide warmth in wind, rain and snow

- Rain boots or other comfortable shoes that will keep your feet warm and dry during wet weather
- Gloves, a hat and a scarf are also essential, as are warm sweaters.

*For programs during the spring and summer months, bring:*

- Mid-weight and lightweight jackets that are waterproof
- Bathing suit, shorts, summer dresses, short-sleeved T-shirts, etc.

*Other essential items include:*

- Plenty of socks and underwear
- Comfortable walking shoes — waterproof them to extend their wear
- Flip-flops (for the hallways and bathrooms)

### **DO NOT BRING:**

- Too many dressy outfits. Generally, you only need to bring one pair of dress shoes and a few dressy outfits for special occasions. Some clubs will not allow entrance if you are wearing sneakers. Many students take the opportunity to buy clothes in Florence so they can blend in with the locals.
- Clothing with special washing instructions (i.e., "lay flat to dry" or "dry clean only")
- Clothes you might wear. Only bring things you are sure to use.

### **PRACTICAL ITEMS**

#### **Do bring:**

- Basic toiletries to get you through your first few nights when shops might not be open — shampoo, soap, moisturizing lotion, toothbrush/toothpaste, dental floss, shaving cream, personal hygiene products, deodorant, comb, brush, tissues, lip balm, etc. Do not waste valuable luggage space with huge economy containers of shampoo, etc., unless it is imperative that you have a specific brand. Italians do wash, too!
- Battery alarm clock
- Your favorite cosmetics, perfume or cologne — they may not be easy to find abroad
- A basic medical kit containing any pain relievers you typically use (these are expensive overseas),

and any preferred cold/cough medicines, bandages, upset stomach and motion sickness remedies, antibiotic cream, etc. You probably will not find the same brands you use in the U.S., but you will find an equivalent.

- Prescription medication — bring enough to get you through the program, and bring a copy of the prescription with you
- Contact lens supplies, extra eyeglasses, a copy of your eyeglass prescription
- Sunglasses
- Extra memory cards and batteries, which can be very expensive abroad
- Photos of your family and friends
- Journal and address book
- Bath towels, a hand towel and washcloths. (Some apartments may have towels, but this cannot be guaranteed in advance.)
- ATM Card, Visa Travel Money Card and a credit card, plus photocopies of each for security and for yourself.
- Extra passport photos (all passport photos, including those submitted to AIFS, must be clear head-and-shoulders shots)
- Disposable or miniature flashlight
- Camera
- iPod/MP3 Player and charger
- Laptop (but insure it, as it will not be covered under the AIFS plan)
- Electrical converter and adaptor set, if you are bringing any small electrical appliances
- Passport pouch / Money belt
- Photocopy of your passport and any visas/Green Card (kept separate from your original passport—very important). Also leave a copy at home.
- This Florence Student Handbook to use as a reference
- A guidebook for Italy
- A phrasebook and/or pocket dictionary. Although many Italians speak basic English well, you will find that products in supermarkets and other shops are labeled in Italian. You will also find that a basic knowledge of the language will help you integrate better into Italian culture.

### Do not bring:

- Bed linens or a pillow — these items will be provided
- Large or heavy electrical appliances
- School supplies (other than your required textbooks). Loose-leaf paper and notebooks are not necessary since Italian brands will not fit into American binders and vice-versa. Although Italian paper and notebooks are different from what you use, they are easy enough to find.
- American stamps. They have no value outside the U.S. You will be able to buy stamps from the post offices and news agents overseas.
- Irreplaceable, valuable or expensive items.

### EUROPEAN TOURIST OFFICES

A wealth of informative and practical literature may be obtained for free from the member national tourist offices of the European Travel Commission. The tourist office brochures often include maps and information on weather, hotels, restaurants and sports.



*Austrian National Tourist Office* [www.austria.info](http://www.austria.info)

*Belgian National Tourist Office* [www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)

*British National Tourist Office* [www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com)

*Czech Tourist Board* [www.czechtourism.com](http://www.czechtourism.com)

*French Government Tourist Office* [www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com)

*German National Tourist Office* [www.germany.travel/en](http://www.germany.travel/en)

*Greek National Tourist Office* [www.greektourism.com](http://www.greektourism.com)

*Irish Tourist Board* [www.tourismireland.com](http://www.tourismireland.com)

*Italian Government Travel Office* [www.italia.it/en/home](http://www.italia.it/en/home)

*Board of Tourism, Netherlands* [www.holland.com](http://www.holland.com)

*Tourist Office of Spain* [www.spain.info/en\\_US](http://www.spain.info/en_US)

*Switzerland Tourism* [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)

Acquiring an ISIC is advisable. The discounts to which it entitles you are numerous — museum admission, theater tickets, local transportation, movie tickets etc. If you get into the habit of asking, you will be surprised by the number of reductions that are available. To obtain the card, check with your home school's travel or study abroad office first. If student travel services are not offered on your campus, you can call **1-800-2COUNCIL** for information, or visit their website at [www.isic.org](http://www.isic.org).

### PERSONAL SAFETY

Foreigners need to take certain safety precautions abroad.

Here are some points to remember:

**Blend in.** It is not a good idea to stand out or attract undue attention to yourself. Giving the appearance of being a local student will help you to integrate into the host culture. Leave your school sweatshirts, baseball caps and any decidedly American clothing at home. If you want to blend in more, you may want to reconsider how you dress.

Women will ultimately face more safety concerns abroad. Dressing conservatively is advised. In some areas, you may be harassed by unwanted male followers. Ignore this behavior. If they continue to bother you, walk away. Giving them the attention they seek only encourages their behavior. Be reasonably cautious without being so paranoid that you avoid all locals, male or female. Observe the strategy of local women for fending off unwanted attention. It also helps to use common sense: do not go out alone at night and if you have to, be sure to stay on well-lit, main streets. Florence is generally safe, but this is no reason to abandon common sense.

**Be aware of different cultural behavior.** What is customary in the U.S. may send the wrong signals in another country. Think about your behavior, and be attentive to how the locals behave in your new culture.

Also be tolerant of the ways of Florentines and Italians in general. Things you would not tolerate at home may be acceptable in Italy. It is not your place to try and change the traditions and culture of a nation.

**Drink wisely.** Good judgment should prevail in all circumstances where alcohol will be available. The attitudes towards liquor are different in Italy than in the U.S.; wine or beer is often consumed with the evening meal. If you are going to drink, only do so with trusted friends, and be sure at least one friend remains sober.

**Be careful with your belongings.** Carry a money belt or neck pouch securely inside your clothing, and be aware of your surroundings. Pickpockets are numerous in busy

cities. They are most often found in front of hotels, inside Internet cafés and near flea markets, train stations and food markets. Do not carry large sums of cash, and don't keep all your credit/ATM cards in one wallet. Bags or purses should be strapped across both neck and shoulder. Never leave them hanging on the backs of chairs in public places. Instead, keep them on the floor between your feet. Men should carry their wallets in their front pockets. Never tell strangers where you are staying, what your travel plans are, etc.

**Be careful of *where* and *how* you buy.** It is easy to become distracted while making a purchase and get cheated. Be sure that the goods you buy are the ones you actually get. A deal that seems too good to be true probably is. Do not exhibit all of your cash during a purchase. Additionally, it is not wise to display the location of your money, passport or any other valuables. Never opt for convenience over safety, and do not allow yourself to be rushed during a purchase.

**Choose vehicles wisely.** Use only official taxis. Before you get into any cab, make sure that the driver is willing to take you where you want to go. It is also wise to agree on a fare beforehand to avoid any complication when you arrive at your destination. Never get into a cab that already has a passenger. All Florence cabs have an orange taxi sign on the roof. Pay phones have cab phone numbers posted on them. You cannot flag down cabs in the street. Also, they are metered, so you know what you are paying.

**Use the buddy system whenever possible.** If you are out at night, stick to the main avenues, and take along a friend or two. Stay away from parks after sunset. If you must go out alone after dark, make sure you tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.

**If you plan to jog, do not do so after dark.** Be careful of local drivers who may not be used to people running along the road.

**If you ever feel you are in a dangerous situation, head for the nearest hotel or restaurant and ask for help.**

## **DRUG ARREST**

Almost half the Americans jailed abroad are arrested on drug charges. Despite repeated warnings, drug arrests and convictions are still on the increase. If you are caught with either soft or hard drugs overseas, you are subject to local, not U.S., laws. Penalties for possession or

trafficking are often the same. If arrested, you will find that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Most countries will not accept bail.
- Pretrial detention, often solitary confinement, may last months.
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts such as beds, toilets and washbasins.
- Diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives or friends.
- Officials may not speak English.
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading and inhumane treatment and extortion are all possible.

If convicted, you may face a sentence of:

- two to 10 years in most countries;
- a minimum of six years hard labor and a stiff fine in some countries;
- death in countries such as Turkey, Algeria and Iran.

Do not get involved with illegal drugs overseas.

Students should be aware that AIFS takes an extremely serious view of drug use on the program. Action in such cases, no matter how small the amount in the student's possession, will involve instant dismissal from the program, and the student's home school will be informed. Such disciplinary action will be initiated for any student involved in drug use.

It is essential that Italian laws regarding drug use be understood fully. Possession of any drugs, including marijuana, is punishable by law, and the penalties are severe. Foreigners are liable to be treated more severely than locals.

Overseas visitors convicted of drug-related offenses face enormous fines and deportation from the country. Convictions are frequent for possession of drugs. It is particularly dangerous to purchase from dealers or at clubs, as these people are often police informers. You could be followed home and arrested after purchasing drugs, or your building could be raided by the police after a tip-off.

Smuggling drugs into Italy from abroad is illegal. There is an extremely high chance of being discovered, and penalties are very severe, including possible imprisonment.



## **LEGAL AID**

If you have difficulties with the local authorities abroad, remember that you are subject to local laws. Unfortunately, the assistance that American officials can offer is limited by foreign laws, by U.S. laws, and by geography. The U.S. government has no funds for your legal fees and other related expenses.

You should consult a consular officer if you find yourself in a dispute that could lead to legal or police action. Although U.S. consular officers cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find adequate legal representation. It should be noted that the consular attorneys' lists, although carefully prepared, are compiled from local bar association lists and responses to questionnaires. Neither the Department of State nor U.S. embassies nor consulates can assume any responsibility for the caliber, competence or professional integrity of the attorney.

Consular officers will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. However, they CANNOT get you out of jail. If you are arrested, ask permission to notify the consular officer at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Under international agreement and practice, you have a right to get in touch with the American Consulate. If you are turned down, keep asking politely and persistently. If unsuccessful, try to have someone get in touch with the consulate for you.

When alerted, American officials will visit you, advise you of your rights according to local laws, and contact your family and friends if you ask them to do so. If your prison facilities are inadequate (as is often the case), consuls can transfer money, food and clothing from your family and friends to the prison authorities. They will try to get relief if you are held under inhumane or unhealthy conditions or treated less favorably than others in the same situation.

## **AIFS Disciplinary Action**

Important rules:

- Quiet hours in your apartments are 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
- No overnight guests are allowed.
- Excessive alcohol abuse will not be tolerated.
- Involvement with drugs will not be tolerated.
- Violent or verbally abusive behavior towards staff or students will not be tolerated.

AIFS has a written warning system. For persistent abuse of the rules, a student will receive a written warning. Upon

receipt of the third warning, the student will be obligated to leave the program, forfeiting the right to a refund and returning home at his/her own expense.

**Please note that, in addition to the AIFS rules, students are subject to their own college's rules while on a study abroad program.** All students should make sure they are aware of their college's code of conduct, as any infractions will be noted not just by AIFS but also reported back to the student's home college where additional disciplinary action may take place once they return to campus. This also refers to academic conduct. Tardiness, unexcused absence from class and disruptive behavior in the classroom will be handled as it would if you were on your home campus.

Involvement with illegal drugs and any other illegal activity will lead to immediate dismissal.

## **CULTURE SHOCK**

Culture shock is a general term used to describe the feelings of anxiety, frustration, fear or loneliness which people often experience when leaving a familiar socio-cultural environment and moving into a new one. It varies in degree from one individual to another. It occurs in young and old alike, and it can happen within one's own country (for example, a move from Iowa to New York City).

Florence will not have the family, friends and familiar places to which you are accustomed. You will be leaving a climate, geography, eating habits and social behavior you understand well. All of these things will be different in Italy, and this will almost inevitably result in some degree of culture shock.

It is not uncommon to have problems adapting to a new culture — different food, the strain of speaking a foreign language, etc. Most people start to experience culture shock after several weeks. The symptoms vary from person to person. Some people find they suddenly become short-tempered and annoyed with certain behavior that characterizes the new culture. Others feel tired and lose their enthusiasm to experience new things. They want familiar, comfortable surroundings and habits. Some become depressed and miss very specific people or things from home. Students feel somewhat overwhelmed by the newness of it all during this stage. It is important to remember that this is a stage, and that it does go away.

Symptoms can also include fatigue, homesickness, sleeping long hours, preferring to be alone instead of with people, boredom and irritability. You may notice others going through this before you realize that you feel it yourself. Talk about culture shock with your friends, roommates or classmates, and compare your feelings and impressions. This helps you understand and adjust to

cultural differences more quickly. If you experience any of these symptoms, try to control the situation by taking positive steps. Sometimes it is helpful just to know that these feelings are normal, but it also requires effort on your part to turn the situation around. Feel free to talk to the AIFS staff. They are experienced in dealing with the symptoms of culture shock and may be able to offer some useful advice.

During the culture shock stage you need to find ways to take care of yourself and the feelings you are experiencing. Past study abroad participants recommend the following:

- Write home instead of calling. Contact old friends, professors and family in the U.S. Ask your family to send clippings from your local newspaper. This will help you feel connected to people at home.
- Keep a journal tracking your journey from start to finish.
- Try to identify particular things you miss. Decide whether they are things for which you can find similar replacements in the new culture or whether they are unique to home. Whenever possible, try to find and enjoy the replacement.
- Do not cut yourself off from people in your host culture. It makes it harder to adjust if you isolate yourself or spend time only with Americans. Try to involve yourself with new friends, teachers and activities. Remind yourself of what is interesting and rewarding about these people and events. Do not focus on the differences between them and the U.S.
- Establish a routine as quickly as possible. Plan your study hours and the days you'll spend exploring and visiting the city. Your time abroad will pass quickly, and there's a lot to do.
- Do not have overly high expectations for yourself. Do not expect to be speaking fluent Italian and having many Italian friends in the first few days. Realistic expectations of yourself and Florence will ease your adjustment.

Students generally pass through a number of phases while working to adapt to a new culture:

- **Initial Excitement:** At first, everything is new and exciting. This phase can last anywhere from one week to two months depending on the person. It is characterized by a sense of enthusiasm for the new culture and the feeling that it is not all so different and difficult.

- **Adjustment:** After a while, you will adapt and get used to your new surroundings. You will be able to communicate better in the language. The most frustrating part of the adjustment process has ended. It no longer seems exhausting to get through each day struggling with the language and new customs.
- **Unresolved problems:** Everyone reaches a point of frustration with adjustment. You may feel overwhelmed and wish to return home. Do not hesitate to see the AIFS staff. They are more than willing to listen, help and offer advice. Never feel that you are the only student to experience these emotions.
- **Acclimation/Integration:** Things begin to improve, and you feel that you belong. For visiting students, this acclimation is a merging of both your old culture and the new culture. You have not lost American values or habits, but you have integrated them with new customs.
- **Departure Concern:** You begin to feel apprehensive about returning home and re-adapting to your culture. You have changed as a person and have mixed feelings about going home. You will begin to wonder whether your family and friends can understand the tremendous growth you have experienced. Will you be able to reconnect? These concerns are very real, and you will find you have them even after you return to the U.S. There is even something called "reverse culture shock," which is the adjustment to re-assimilate when you return home.

### Big City Life

If you are not accustomed to living in big cities, Florence may well be intimidating, confusing and frustrating at first. Try not to get overtired at the beginning, and if you are used to the countryside, plan occasional weekends outside the city. The AIFS Program Coordinator will be able to help provide suggestions for such outings.

### ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS

Here are some tips and suggestions that will make your study abroad experience run more smoothly:

- Pack light! You may get sick of wearing the same outfit, but you'll thank yourself when it's time to pack up and go home.

- Casual clothes are of greater necessity than dress clothes.
- Overestimate the amount of money you will need.
- Keep a journal, diary or travel log, and keep notes on everything. It will help record memories and identify photos later on.
- Mail is extremely important. Be sure to write to people. A letter is more valuable than an e-mail.
- Read about all the places you are going to visit. Get maps for each place, and mark 10 to 15 things you want to see or do in each place.
- Florence is a great starting point for many European journeys, but don't fly off every weekend and forget to see Florence itself and the surrounding area.
- Bring comfortable, sturdy shoes for walking/hiking, and break them in before you leave the U.S.
- Keep in mind that some places, like cathedrals, will not admit you sleeveless, in shorts, in baseball caps or in a backless or halter top. Be considerate of these requirements.
- Ask locals and experienced travelers for recommendations on places to go and things to see, from sites to restaurants, bars and clubs.
- Bring an extra copy of your birth certificate, two additional passport photos and a photocopy of your passport, just in case the original is lost or stolen. Keep your passport and money in a safe place at all times.
- Send a photocopy of the information page of your passport (the page with your picture) to the AIFS Stamford, CT, office, and bring one with you to Florence.
- Purses and bags should have shoulder straps and zippers to deter pickpockets.
- Bring extra memory cards and batteries — they are very expensive in Europe.
- Know that you won't find all the luxuries of home, but you will find the necessities.
- Don't expect to find water fountains, and don't expect to get ice in your drinks.
- Think of every new food as a new dining experience.
- Budget your money! You can't afford to spend it all in one place, so plan ahead. Major cities cost more than the countryside.
- Don't carry too much cash with you at one time, as if it gets stolen, it can be difficult to prove and replace.
- Most importantly, go with an open mind and expect differences.

## IN FLORENCE

### THE CITY OF FLORENCE

Florence is the sixth largest city in Italy with a population of approximately 400,000. It has both the advantages and disadvantages of a city: traffic, noise and confusion, but also a rich cultural life, museums, markets, elegant shops, restaurants and good public transportation.

Florence has been one of the most important cities in Italy for centuries and was even the country's capital for a time. When the political capital was established definitively in Rome, Florence continued to be the cultural capital. Florentines are exceedingly proud of their city and its history and try to impart this opinion to visitors. They will do their best — and will even consider it a point of pride — to make your stay in Florence as pleasant and educational

as possible. They will also expect you to live up to their own high standards. It can be hard to do, but the rewards will be great.

### GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO YOUR RESIDENCE

Students selecting the AIFS flight will be met at the airport in Italy by a member of the AIFS staff. This person will greet you just outside the customs area and will transfer you to your accommodations.

Legally, AIFS staff is not allowed to proceed to the gate or into the customs area. If you have any problems before meeting the AIFS representative (i.e., lost luggage), see

the appropriate airport staff, but also ask a fellow AIFS student (AIFS students will have similar luggage tags) to inform the AIFS representative of your situation.

Please also be aware that if you are on the group flight and are offered and accept incentives by the airline to switch to a later flight, AIFS staff will no longer be able to meet you at the airport, and we cannot guarantee that someone will be available to let you into your apartment. The program should be your priority.

Students who make their own transportation arrangements are responsible for making their own way to their residence. You should plan on flying into Pisa or Florence.

- **From Pisa Airport to Florence:** You can take either a train or a bus. Trains go directly to Florence's main train station, Santa Maria Novella train station. It costs approximately €9.20 (\$12) and will take approximately an hour and a half. Tickets can be bought at the counter in the airport arrivals hall. For the most up-to-date train schedules, please visit [www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com).

Please remember that there is more than one train station in Florence, but Santa Maria Novella is the main one.

The Autostradale bus service from Pisa airport to Florence is €7.50 (\$8) one way. Bus tickets must be bought at the ticket counter in the airport arrivals hall. The bus journey will take approximately one hour and ten minutes. For the most up-to-date bus schedule, visit <http://www.autostradale.it/airports/7/45/?lang=1>. Students arriving later in the evening into Pisa will want to take the bus as it runs much later than the train.

- **From Florence Airport:** There is a bus called VolainBus from the airport to the main train station, Santa Maria Novella. The bus runs approximately once an hour; you can find their time schedule online at [www.ataf.net](http://www.ataf.net). It costs approximately €6 (\$8) one way and will take approximately 30 minutes. From the train station, you will need to take a taxi to the accommodation. Alternatively, you may take a taxi from the airport directly to your accommodation for around €25 (\$35), depending on how much luggage you have and what time of day you arrive. The taxi rank is right outside the airport. Do not tip the taxi driver – this is not done in Italy.

**When you first arrive in Florence, a taxi will be the best way to get yourself to the hotel/your apartment with your luggage. Taxis are plentiful at the train station and Florence airport and are metered.**

## Transit within Florence

Although Florence is a large city, it is fairly easy to get around most of the historical center, where the Study Center is located, on foot. The city is also well-connected by a bus system. Tickets can be purchased at any tobacconist shop displaying an orange "A.T.A.F." sign or at the A.T.A.F. office in Florence. Students may purchase single tickets, multiples of two or four, or a monthly pass, among other options.

When you board the bus, validate your ticket by stamping it in the machines located at the back. Failure to validate your ticket may result in a hefty fine.

## ORIENTATION

When you arrive in Florence, you will be directed to your housing and given information about the facilities available to you while in Florence. An orientation program has been designed to help you settle in and acclimate to your new environment as quickly and painlessly as possible.

It will not be possible to have an orientation meeting the day you arrive. In addition to time constraints, you will be very tired. Instead, you will receive a welcome packet that will give you enough information to see you through to orientation. Read it!!

- During your orientation meeting, you will be given a safety and security briefing plus a welcome pack containing program information relating to itineraries, schedules and cultural activity calendars specific to your program. You will also be given academic information and practical information about living in your Florence accommodations.
- The two-hour orientation is meant to provide an introduction to the program and life in Florence. Additional workshops on more specific aspects of the program, including cultural differences, travel, etc., may be held during the days following the orientation.

## HOUSING AND MEALS

### Accommodations

Students will be housed in a shared room in an apartment. In the apartment, four to six students normally share a two- or three-bedroom apartment with cooking facilities. No meals are provided, but students can purchase AIFS meal vouchers prior to departure.

A considerable amount of time is spent on the housing of each student and it is, therefore, essential that all housing questions on the AIFS application/enrollment form be answered honestly and fully, and that you specify any preferred roommates and any special medical conditions.



If you feel you did not fully state your needs, please submit any additional information in writing to AIFS. You can email the Florence staff directly at [Florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:Florence@aifs.co.uk).

**The AIFS Program Coordinator reserves the right to change room assignments during the program. AIFS staff also reserves the right to enter students' rooms. However, every effort is made to do so in the presence of the students or with the students' permission.**

Students should check in with the AIFS Program Coordinator on a regular basis and must notify him/her if they are going to be away, even if they will only be away for the night.

**Please submit all housing and roommate requests in writing to AIFS at [Florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:Florence@aifs.co.uk).**

### Roommates

Students wishing to be roommates must both indicate their preference on the AIFS program application/enrollment form. You must request each other. If you decide that you would like to room with someone after you have submitted your application/enrollment form, please notify AIFS at [Florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:Florence@aifs.co.uk), and have your prospective roommate do the same. Please include your college name in any correspondence.

All rooming is single-sex unless we receive written authorization from your college's program coordinator.

### Housing Rules

Successful communal living requires consideration for those around you. We would appreciate your cooperation in observing the following rules during your stay in Florence.

### Apartments

**Quiet Hours.** Good behavior is a must if everyone is to get along well, not only with other students, but also with the other people staying in the apartment building. Therefore, please do not play music loudly, disturb other residents when you return late at night, or gather in the hallways to talk. Quiet hours are between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. and should be strictly followed.

**No overnight guests are allowed.** For security, legal and insurance reasons, only authorized residents may stay overnight in the rooms. If you have friends visiting you in Florence, the AIFS Program Coordinator will be able to help you find them a place to stay. By law, we register you with the police as the legal occupants of the apartment. Do not invite friends to stay with you.

**Never leave doors unlocked or windows open.** You are responsible for the security of your own belongings and should take all necessary precautions.

**Cleanliness and tidying are your responsibility.** To help maintain good relations with your roommates, please make every effort to keep your room and apartment clean. Apartment residents will be provided with a change of linen that you will be responsible for laundering.

**A list of laundromats and dry cleaners** is available from the AIFS Program Coordinator.

**Please be aware that you will be charged for any damages you cause to the apartment**, including charges for extra cleaning. You will also be charged for excessive use of utilities above the Italian standard usage. Do not attempt to adjust heat settings in your apartment, as you can inadvertently increase your consumption.

### Towels

Towels for bathing are not provided in the apartments. Make sure to bring a bath towel and washcloth with you.

### Laundry facilities

Clean linen is provided, but students are responsible for washing it and changing their own beds. All accommodations in Florence have washing machines but no clothes dryers. There are, however, many laundromats in Florence. The machines are coin-operated, and a wash-and-dry will cost approximately €7 for a small load and €10 for a large load.

### Meals

Meals typically are not included in the program fee (check your AIFS application/Program Info Sheet for details), but all students will have kitchens in their apartments where they can prepare their own meals. At the time of enrollment, students have the option to purchase a meal plan consisting of vouchers that can be used to purchase meals at selected restaurants in Florence. The meal vouchers will be distributed in Florence by the AIFS Program Coordinator.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Students should have all mail sent to:

**Name of Student c/o AIFS**

**Piazza dei Peruzzi 1**

**50122 Florence**

**Italy**

Be sure to leave this address with family and friends.

### Calling home

The cheapest way to call home is via the Internet using Skype, FaceTime or other similar applications. Calls are

free if they are Skype-to-Skype or FaceTime-to-FaceTime and are still significantly cheaper if they are from Skype or FaceTime to a landline or cell phone.

If an Internet connection is not available, then head to one of the international calling centers dotted around the city. These places normally also function as Internet cafés. Inside the calling center or Internet café, you will find private phone booths where you can make inexpensive international phone calls. The first time you go to use a calling center you will need to show them your passport in order to register.

### **Calling Cards**

Alternatively, you can buy pre-paid international calling cards which you can use from a cell phone or a public phone. You are advised to purchase these cards once you are in Florence instead of from the U.S. There is a huge choice of cards available in Florence, and they can be used with pay phones or with cell phones. There will be instructions on the back of the calling card. If you have been given a pre-paid card in the U.S. prior to departure, feel free to use it until the credit has run out, but do not top it up from Florence. A locally bought card will be much more economical. Refer to the Communications handout on the AIFS portal nearer to departure for more information.

### **Public phones**

Public phone booths are gray and yellow and are located all over the city. Public phones are also found in bars displaying a round sign with a telephone in the center. Overseas calls can be made from all of these phones.

### **Cell Phones**

Many students purchase cell phones when in Florence. They can cost \$30 to \$60 for a basic model cell phone and an Italian SIM card that works on a pay-as-you-go basis. This means that instead of receiving a huge bill at the end of the program, you buy credit for the phone in advance and add more as necessary.

Alternatively, you may bring your American cell phone if you have it unlocked prior to departure for Italy. Once in Italy, you can buy an Italian SIM card on a pay-as-you-go plan as mentioned above. Although it is quite expensive to make calls, especially international ones, it is free for you to receive them. This makes the phones ideal for family or friends who want to reach you. It is also a great way for you to get in touch with friends on the program. If you plan on making international calls, you should think about getting a calling card.

AIFS staff will have information about where to buy the phones and up-to-date prices when you arrive in Florence.

AIFS will post on our portal a pre-departure handout on Communications nearer to departure that will provide more information.

**If a relative or guardian needs to reach you in case of an emergency, he or she should call the AIFS Florence Emergency Number: 011 39 340 836 5089. If you are in Europe and need to reach this line, dial 0039 340 836 5089.**

## **ACADEMIC LIFE**

---

Classes are normally held at the AIFS study center Monday through Thursday, between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., although some Friday classes are possible, and some classes may run into the evening.

There will be an academic orientation at the start of the program that will cover classroom and course information, and any other issues related to the academic aspects of the program.

### **Italian Life and Culture**

Depending on your program, you may take a course in Italian Life and Culture. Topics may include: the history of Florence, Italian politics, the Mafia and organized crime, educations, and Italy's role in Europe. Check with your campus coordinator for additional information.

### **Libraries**

Most students find that the textbooks they bring from the U.S., along with materials given out by faculty, provide them with enough study material.

However, for studying we recommend that you use the Italian libraries. This will also help you integrate into Italian student life. Generally Italian libraries have only Italian books and you will not have borrowing rights, but they are excellent places to study. Italian libraries usually are not open after 7:00 p.m., and do not open on Sundays.

If you find that you do need to use a library, you can join the British Institute Library in Lungarno Guicciardini 9. Additional details will be available on arrival from the AIFS Program Coordinator.

### **Textbooks**

Arrangements for obtaining course textbooks for the Florence program's courses vary according to the program. Check with your campus coordinator who can provide additional information. Be sure to bring your books with you, as they may be difficult to find in Florence if they have not been pre-ordered at your school's request.

## COMPUTERS

---

### Internet/E-mail Access

Limited Internet facilities are available at the school, but there is free wireless for those who bring a laptop. Remember to bring a flash drive so you can print any work you have done on your laptop. Also remember to bring the correct converter for European electricity, and the proper plug adaptor. Finally, be sure you have insurance on your computer.

More and more cafés, restaurants, etc., now have free wireless access. There are no fixed phone lines in the student housing, but it is becoming quite common for students to access a wireless signal in their apartments.

## TRAVEL

---

While you are in Florence, there will be many opportunities to travel further afield into the rest of Europe.

### Travel out of Florence

Studying and living in one particular city in Europe, while fulfilling in itself, gives you only a limited view of European life. In order to appreciate the differences in culture fully, you will no doubt want to explore outside of Florence and visit other towns, cities and countries.

**Start your research online** – you can look up train times in Italy and throughout Europe, book cheap accommodations and best of all, you can find some really cheap deals on flights around Europe with the many budget airlines that have transformed airline travel for Europeans in recent years.

**Budget airlines** include EasyJet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)), Ryanair ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)), Vueling ([www.vueling.com](http://www.vueling.com)), transavia.com ([www.transavia.com](http://www.transavia.com)) and Norwegian Air ([www.norwegian.com](http://www.norwegian.com)).

Please be aware that although flights can be incredibly cheap, there are **extra hidden costs**, such as tax charges, compulsory online check-in charges and baggage check-in charges. Additionally, the airport names used can be misleading. Pisa Airport is often referred to as Florence Airport, though Pisa is a totally different city and is over an hour away from Florence! Flight times also can be problematic. If the flight departs particularly early in the morning or lands particularly late at night, you must make sure there is transportation to and from the airport at those times. Otherwise, you might find that you have to spend money on a hotel near the airport, which then defeats the point of buying a cheap flight. While AIFS is not a travel agent and therefore cannot make reservations on your behalf, AIFS staff will hold travel workshops during your first week in Florence to discuss in greater detail the

options available to you and give helpful hints to get you started.

**AIFS is unable to store any excess luggage for students who plan either to arrive in Florence prior to the start of the program or stay after the end of the program.**

If you are seeking accommodation in Florence before the start of the program, please email [Florence@aifs.co.uk](mailto:Florence@aifs.co.uk) for recommendations on local hostels and hotels in the area. You will also find additional information in the *Traveling* handout posted on the AIFS portal nearer to departure.

## HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE

---

Most medical treatment, including hospital and private consultation, has to be paid for privately.

These charges can, however, be reclaimed through the AIFS group insurance plan which covers all students on the program, subject to the conditions of the policy. Students must pay a \$50 deductible for each covered injury or illness. Detailed listings of doctors in your area are available from the AIFS Program Coordinator. The Coordinator can make appointments for you and will provide you with a Medical Claim Form to complete, or you may print this form from the AIFS portal ([www.aifspartnerships.com](http://www.aifspartnerships.com), found in the Insurance Brochure PDF). Keep all receipts from any doctor's visits or for any medications, and submit them with the claim form. Refunds can only be processed with a completed form and accompanying receipts.

Details of other medical services are also available upon request from the AIFS Program Coordinator, e.g., dentistry, family planning, homeopathy, chiropractic, etc. Be sure to note, though, that there are exemptions that are not covered by the AIFS insurance. As AIFS insurance does not cover pre-existing conditions, it is essential that students with such conditions speak to their own insurers and make arrangements to have their existing coverage extended to cover them abroad.

### Counseling

Some of you may be away from home for the first time, and even if you are used to living in a dorm, adjusting to life in a new city and a different culture can be very tough at first. During the first few days it's natural to feel a little strange, disoriented and homesick, especially if also suffering from jet lag. If you feel any of these symptoms when you arrive or experience any other kind of problem during your stay in Florence, whether personal, practical or academic, do not hesitate to seek help and support from the AIFS Program Coordinator. AIFS is concerned about

student welfare and can help when individual problems occur.

## CLIMATE

---

Florence's climate is fairly mild but can get quite cold in the fall and winter. November is Florence's rainy month, and spring doesn't usually arrive until late April or early May.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
50/35°F	53/37°F	58/41°F	65/45°F	74/52°F	81/58°F
10/2°C	12/3°C	15/5°C	19/8°C	23/11°C	27/15°C

JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
87/62°F	100/65°F	79/57°F	69/50°F	58/43°F	50/37°F
31/17°C	40/18°C	26/14°C	21/10°C	15/6°C	10/3°C

## ELECTRICITY

---

Electrical current varies throughout the world. Appliances designed to operate on U.S. electricity (110/120 volts) will not operate overseas where the electrical power is twice that found in the U.S. (220/240 volts).

Purchase an electrical converter and adaptor set before you depart the U.S. This will protect any electrical appliances you bring with you and will allow you to operate them on European voltage. Better yet, bring as few electrical appliances as possible. Wait until you are in Florence, and share the cost of buying a cheap hairdryer or speakers (for laptops and MP3s) among your roommates. It also cuts down on what you have to carry.

Utilities in Italy are very expensive. Consequently, Italians are very conscious of lights left on when no one is in the room, wasted hot water and unnecessary phone calls. During the winter, hot water is regulated by central heating, which by Italian law can only be kept on for a limited amount of time per day. Be prepared to wear warm clothes most of the time, indoors as well as outdoors. Central heating in Italy is not as efficient as in the U.S., and you will need to learn to adapt. Italian homes are made to be cool in hot weather but not necessarily warm in the winter.

Please keep this in mind for your own apartments. AIFS pays for what is considered "normal usage" of utilities. Excessive usage may result in all roommates being charged for the excess.

## SPORTS

---

Facilities in Florence are limited. There are a few tennis courts, basketball courts and 5-a-side soccer pitches

available to rent, and a covered swimming pool is open all winter. Many students jog along the Arno River or in the wooded park, the Cascine. It is also possible to go horseback riding.

There are a few gyms that offer student discounts, but you will still find them more expensive and less well-equipped than in the U.S. Many students find the walking they do and vast amount of steps in Florence give them plenty of exercise. AIFS will not assist students in the renting or purchasing of motorbikes and mopeds and strongly recommends that students do not look into them themselves.

## Q & A

---

### Will there be any cultural activities?

Yes! Depending on your program, AIFS will organize a variety of weekly activities for you. Some activities may be included in or partially subsidized by your program fees. Recent examples include wine tasting, soccer matches, cooking classes and opera performances. More details will be given at orientation.

### Can I work while in Florence?

No. Due to visa restrictions and labor laws in Italy, you may not obtain employment abroad while studying on a tourist visa.

### Must I fly with AIFS?

No. However, if you purchase the AIFS Transportation Package and fly on the standard program departure and return dates, you will receive the transfer from the airport to your residence as part of the package. There are no direct transatlantic flights to Florence; there will be a change of planes at some point during your journey. If you make your own flight arrangements, you are responsible for arranging your own transfers, and for any costs involved.

If you will be providing your own transportation, be sure to complete and send back to the AIFS offices in both Connecticut and Florence the *Independent Travel Info Form* available on the AIFS portal.

### Can I change my return flight?

Maybe. For a fee and subject to airline approval and availability, you may try to change your return flight date only.

This must be done directly with the agent once you are abroad. AIFS staff will advise on the procedure. Only date changes are allowed; there can be no changes to the routing, and there will be an airline-imposed fee that could



be as high as \$350 or more. Additionally, if you have a connecting flight in the U.S., you must check whether you are able to change that U.S. domestic flight, since some cannot be changed.

**How long after the program ends will my damage deposit be refunded?**

Your damage deposit refund should reach you approximately three months after the end of your program. It will be mailed to the address we had on file for you prior to your departure. Be sure to send us your new address if your old address is no longer valid. There is a check re-issuance fee of \$25, so be sure to deposit your check quickly, and to let us know if you haven't received it.

**Do I get a refund if I change my mind and decide not to go on the program?**

Carefully read the AIFS refund policy on the program *Agreement and Release form*. When you sign this form, you sign a statement indicating your understanding of the refund policy and your compliance with it.

**How much luggage can I bring?**

Airlines have baggage size limits and they impose a high surcharge for excess weight. Read the information in this handbook, and contact the airline directly for the latest regulations.