

AIFS LONDON





AIFS Student Services

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Friday : 8am-5pm

Nearest Underground Stations:

Goodge St

Russell Square

Euston Square

Warren St

Introduction

Your upcoming study abroad experience may well change your life. It will certainly change your perceptions and lead you to new thoughts and directions.

As you prepare to leave the U.S., take some time to consider your plans and expectations. It is interesting and fun to compare them before your departure and after your return. Many come true. Others are tempered by the reality of your experience abroad. Flexibility in attitudes and expectations will enhance your ability to enjoy a new culture and to experience another country's lifestyle. Try to be open-minded and don't compare everything to what you are accustomed to at home. Sure, life may seem less luxurious and comfortable, but there are many other things to compensate for this.

What you get from your time abroad will depend on how much effort you put into breaking away from your American group and meeting new people in the communities you're visiting. AIFS will do everything it can to provide you with advice, information, resources and suggestions on how to do this. Make the most of this assistance and get out and see Britain and Europe.

You are sure to have many questions and concerns before the start of your program. You will be able to answer many of your own questions if you take the time to review this pre-departure handbook and do a little extra research before your departure.

This will enable you to leave feeling more confident and prepared.

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Packing

Deciding what to bring and what to leave behind can be a difficult task. Students always find that they have brought more clothing than was necessary. Remember that you have to carry your luggage yourself; there will be nobody to help you and elevators are sometimes scarce. You will not have much closet space to store your clothes and if you are planning to travel after the program you will have to carry your own luggage.

Below is a list of clothing and practical items you may want to consider packing and a guide to the weather to assist you.

LONDON WEATHER

These statistics show the average sunshine hours, temperate and rainfall throughout the year. Please bear in mind these are for guidance only and the weather is very unpredictable in the UK!

	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Sunshine hours	6	5	5	3
Min Temp (F)	52	47	41	37
Max Temp (F)	68	60	53	48
Rainfall (inches)	2.0	2.7	2.3	2.1

CLOTHING

Please try and pack as light as you can. Simply bring a few of your favourite clothes that you find comfortable. There are shops in the UK, such as H&M, Top Shop, TK Maxx that do sell clothes at reasonable prices, if you get desperate for additions to your wardrobe.

DO BRING:

- Clothing that can be worn layered to adapt to the range of different temperatures and without frequent washings. For example jeans, long and short sleeved t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters etc.
- Comfortable Socks and Underwear (White socks are not that common in Europe)
- Comfortable walking shoes (In Europe most people wear sneakers to the gym only, not as everyday footwear)
- An umbrella, a waterproof coat with a hood

DO NOT BRING:

- Too many dressy outfits. There are not so many opportunities to wear them. However, if you do like to go out in the evening, many clubs will only admit people who are suitably dressed. Sometimes they do not allow sneakers and jeans.
- 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 wear.

PRACTICAL ITEMS

DO BRING:

- Basic toiletries - enough to last you through the first few days – you will be able to buy more when you arrive in London
- A towel
- Plug adapters (US 2 Pin→ UK 3 Pin and US 2 Pin→ European 2 Pin). Plugs in the UK and the rest of Europe are different so your plug adapters for the UK will not work for example in Italy. Make sure that you bring a few adapters for the UK and the rest of Europe. (You will find them at Walmart and Target)
- Battery alarm clock
- Your favourite cosmetics, perfume or cologne – they may not be easy to replace abroad
- Voltage convertors. The US runs on 100-120w. The UK uses 200-240w. Without a convertor your appliances won't work and may break.
- Pain-relievers and cold/cough medicines that you typically use - brand names that you normally use back home are not often available outside the US
- Contact lens supplies, extra glasses
- Photos of your family and friends
- Journal and address book
- ATM and visa card
- Passport size photos
- Camera & Charger
- iPod/MP3 player
- Passport pouch/money belt
- Photocopies of your passport
- A guide book for Europe



DO NOT BRING:

- Bed-linen or pillows – these are all provided
- Large or heavy electrical appliances
- School supplies
- Anything that will distress you if you lose it
- Hairdryers & Straighteners – the electrical voltage is different, which prevents US hairdryers from working in the UK. You risk blowing up your favourite straighteners and hairdryer if you bring them along so purchase when you arrive in London instead. Hairdryers are available from £5 (\$10).

****Please ensure that you have adequate insurance for any personal effects such as digital cameras, laptops, etc, that you may be considering bringing.****

LUGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Visit the website of the airline that you are travelling with to check your luggage allowance and weight restrictions. Most airlines will now only allow you to check in one suitcase for free. For additional bags and excess weight you may need to pay a fee.

GENERALLY FOR CHECKED BAGS

1 bag/case, maximum of 50 pounds (23kgs). Maximum linear dimensions of all bags: 62 inches/158cm (length + width + height).

GENERALLY FOR CARRY ON BAGS

1 bag and 1 personal item (which can be a purse or a laptop)

Carry-on bag dimensions should not be more than 9" x 14" x 22" (length + width + height) or 45 linear inches (the length, height and width added together).

LIQUIDS: Remember that there are restrictions on the amount of liquids that you can carry in your hand luggage. To avoid unnecessary delays, it's advisable to pack any liquids that you are bringing with you in to your checked in luggage. If you need to carry liquid items on board they should be placed in a re-sealable clear plastic bag in containers of no more than 100ml capacity. Check with your airline for further advice.

Money

Using an ATM machine (in the relevant local currency), credit cards and a small amount of traveller's cheques are the safest and simplest ways to access money in Europe. It's a good idea to use a combination of all three methods so that you are covered in the majority of situations.

USING AN ATM

The most efficient method of accessing your money is the use of an ATM or "Cashpoint". The American Plus, Maestro, Cirrus and Star networks can be accessed from the cash dispensers of several of the high street banks across Europe, allowing cash to be withdrawn from a U.S. bank account if you have a card which is linked to one of these systems.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE US

- **IMPORTANT:** Inform your bank that you will be in Europe for the next few months. If you don't your cards may be blocked when you try to use them in Europe
- Make sure you get a four-digit PIN number from your bank
- Make sure you have a customer service contact telephone number for your bank to call FROM THE UK should you have any problems with your cards
- Be aware that you may not be able to check your bank balance on European ATM's so you should make sure that you can access your account online
- You should check how much your US bank will charge for each withdrawal before you leave. Your bank may have a partner bank here in the UK that will not charge you or will charge you less to withdraw money so look out for this too
- Make a note of the details of your cards (account numbers etc) so that you can cancel them quickly and easily if they are lost or stolen
- Buy some £GBP so that you have some cash handy when you arrive. Approximately £50 is a good amount to have with you

CREDIT CARDS

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. You will need one for example when purchasing flights or making hotel bookings. Major credit cards, Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted in Europe. Please bear in mind that they should not be thought of as a universal answer to every problem. On entering any establishment where you plan to charge your purchase, be sure to ask that you can use your credit card. Most places have a minimum spend if paying by credit card.

American Express is less widely accepted, however cardholders can take advantage of the services offered by the American Express offices in most European cities.

Please also ensure that you have a 4 digit PIN number for your card – you often have to type this into a keypad when making purchases.

Another option is a prepaid credit/debit card such as Visa Travel Money. With one of these you can preload funds and reload at anytime. It's a good way to manage funds and if you do lose it, you a replacement can be obtained quickly, wherever you are, similar to travellers' cheques.

TRAVELLERS CHEQUES

Travellers cheques are now a rather outdated way of managing your money when you are abroad, even if your parents think they're a good idea! Some banks will no longer exchange travellers cheques. If you wish, bring some travellers cheques as an emergency fund in case your ATM cards are lost or stolen however do not plan to use them as a means of managing your money on a daily basis.

The best known traveller's cheques are American Express and VISA. It's a good idea to keep a record, in a safe place, of the traveller's cheque numbers and purchase agreements. In the event the cheques are lost or stolen, this will greatly facilitate obtaining replacement cheques. All travellers' cheques providers have a global refund service.

We recommend purchasing your traveller's cheques in British Pounds. Be sure to have your passport with you when you exchange your traveller's cheques. Avoid exchanging travellers' cheques for cash on weekends or at hotels or restaurants — you will pay a big premium for the convenience. If you have American Express cheques it is best to change them at one of their offices in most major European cities. www.americanexpress.com.

BANKING

You will *not* be able to open bank accounts during your stay in Europe. Make sure you separate any joint checking / savings accounts you have before you leave the US. Such accounts do not exist in Europe and therefore ATMs cannot access your card details. You will only be able to access money from your checking account so please make sure that you transfer funds as necessary into this account.

Please keep your cards extra safe while in Europe. If they are lost, it can be a complicated procedure to get them replaced. In most cases your bank will only send replacement cards to your American address, not your overseas address, so you could be left without cards for a while.

EMERGENCY TRANSFERS

The fastest way to get money transferred is via Western Union-Money in minutes. This can be done online or over the telephone from the US (1-800-325-6000) and you can pay with a Credit or Debit Card. There is no charge to receive funds; all you need is some ID to pick up the money anywhere in the world. For further information and details on charges look at www.westernunion.com.

FOREIGN CURRENCY

Handling cash will be quite different, coins are used more frequently in Europe and banknotes have different sizes and colours, it's worth taking a minute to familiarise yourself with the currency on arrival. Please don't carry around large sums of cash. If it is lost or stolen, there is no way to replace it and it is not covered by insurance.

TO CHECK THE LATEST EXCHANGE RATE VISIT WWW.XE.COM

TIPPING

Finally, let's talk tipping. As a rule we don't tip excessively in Europe. It's just a cultural difference, most people employed in the service industry are paid a reasonable wage, and therefore Europeans only tip if they have received great service. You are not expected to tip in bars in Europe. The finer points of tipping will be discussed during your orientation when you arrive in Europe...



Security

AIFS has been arranging study abroad for American students for over 50 years and we have had over 1.5 million participants on our programs. As you prepare for this exciting experience, we want you to know that our primary concern is student safety. One of the most frequently asked questions from parents is "Is it safe to study abroad?" I hope the following will answer any questions you may have and help to reassure you that we take our responsibilities very seriously

- 1) AIFS provides detailed security briefings to students on behaviour, dress code and general awareness in Europe. We do not display signs saying American or US outside our student centres.
- 2) All students are asked to register with the American Embassy before they arrive (instructions are in this handbook) We also keep copies on file of passports and photo ID of all current students when they subsequently arrive.
- 3) AIFS has a 24/7 emergency number that students or their families can use to reach AIFS staff immediately in an emergency. If necessary, duty staff can reach senior AIFS staff instantly. AIFS has an incident response plan and all staff members are trained in how to handle any situation which may arise.
- 4) All students are given the number they need to call to reach the local emergency services (police, fire, ambulance), in this case is 999 (101 for non-emergencies) and advised to call this immediately in the event of serious incident, illness or injury. We ask that they also immediately contact AIFS staff using our emergency procedures so that we can provide any additional assistance required. If a student needs to see a doctor or is hospitalised, AIFS staff will accompany/visit them and keep doing so until they are well.
- 5) We receive and monitor all US State Department advisories and inform students of areas of Europe (if any) that are temporarily not recommended for visits by US Citizens. Parents can look at State Department information on the web at this address: <http://travel.state.gov/>
- 6) All students have AIFS medical insurance which provides extensive coverage (see http://www.aifspartnerships.com/pdf/insurance_semester.pdf for details). This includes a Team Assist plan which provides a worldwide 24-hour emergency telephone assistance service. Multilingual help and advice will be provided in the event of any emergency.
- 7) We go to great lengths to be aware of the current whereabouts of all AIFS students. Of course, we know their addresses in their program location and our Student Advisors are in close contact with them on a regular basis. We also require students to log their travel plans, addresses and contact details with us

when travelling outside the city at weekends. We advise students to purchase inexpensive, personal cellular phones and we record their phone numbers so that we can contact them easily.

- 8) In the highly unlikely event of the US State Department issuing a specific Travel Warning that US Citizens in any AIFS study abroad city should return to the USA (this would be unprecedented), AIFS will suspend any currently operating program, fly the students home (with timing as appropriate to the situation) and rebate pro-rata program fees subject to the usual deductions outlined in our agreements.

Communication

When you are away from home you will no doubt feel the need to keep your nearest and dearest up to date about what you are doing. Here is some advice about the various ways you can stay in touch while you are away from home:

Email & Internet

There are dedicated computer and internet facilities for use while you are in London at the AIFS Student Services Office in Bloomsbury. If you are staying with a homestay, they may provide you with internet but this is not guaranteed. There are lots of places in London that you can access free Wi-Fi and there will be an information sheet in your Welcome Packs when you arrive listing a few of these. We recommend you bring a personal laptop for use in London. We recommend using Internet apps such as Skype, Facetime and Whatsapp for free and easy contact with your family and friends back home.

Please note that you will not be provided with an email address in London, so it is best for you to use your school email/Yahoo/Hotmail/Aol or similar account while you are abroad. This is important as we will communicate with you on a regular basis via the email address that you have provided.

Telephones and Mobile (cell) Phones

AIFS recommends that students purchase a UK mobile telephone on arrival in London, if here for a significant period of time. This is a very straightforward way of staying in touch with friends and family back home and fellow students in London.

You can purchase a basic "PAY AS YOU GO" phone on arrival in the UK for an initial payment upwards of £15 and then you can purchase prepaid minutes. With credit on your phone, you can make calls and send text (SMS) messages. It is also possible to send text messages to the USA, however some US networks do not accept or send texts to European phones.

Red Phone Boxes and Payphones

You will see payphones in the street and in certain buildings throughout Britain, although they are a dying breed! Most payphones accept coins and credit cards. Just follow the instructions above the phone. Sadly not all our payphones are in the red boxes but they are still quite common. For your information – all local calls cost money in Britain. Freephone numbers in the UK begin with 0800.



The biggest difference from the US is that in the UK you do not pay to receive calls. You only pay for the calls you make. Once you have your UK number, you can email your friends and family the details and they can call you! (Remember the time difference!) A UK Pay as you call phone does work across Europe (extra fees will be charged to make and receive calls) and you can use an international calling card as well.

European SIM cards + US Phones

Over the last few years some students have brought over a US cellphone with the intention of using it with a UK SIM card. In theory this is possible but in practice, we would not recommend it. There are usually issues with handset compatibility and charging the phone, plus if anything happens to your US phone, getting a replacement is complicated and there are usually tears. It's best to get an inexpensive UK Pay-as-you-go phone.

Homestay students

Homestay students should make personal arrangements with their homestay hosts concerning use of the telephone. Please respect their wishes regarding Calling Cards, length of use and time difference with the USA.

Calling Cards

If you buy a calling card while in the US, please ensure that you ask for an INTERNATIONAL CARD that allows you to call from outside the US back to the US. All of the major US networks (ATT, MCI, SPRINT) provide calling cards that work from anywhere in the world. Just make sure you have the local access number (AIFS student services can help). Calling cards are also available in the UK or online. Please remember the number of minutes varies dramatically depending if you make the call on a Landline, Mobile telephone or Payphone.

Mail



Let's face it, even in this modern age, everyone still loves to receive letters, cards, or even better, packages. You can get mail sent to the AIFS Student Services Centre at Dilke House (address is on page 2). Anything that arrives after you left will be forwarded at our discretion (it can be very costly to send large parcels back to the USA so there are no guarantees) so please advise friends and family that it can take several weeks for parcels to be delivered to the UK and to not mail anything to you towards the end of the programme.

You can post items yourself via the Post Office in the UK and various private companies such as UPS and FedEx. More info can be obtained while you are here from the Student Services office.

Travelling around the UK and Europe

You are embarking on a Study Abroad Program, however you will have free weekends in order to travel and explore. In order to make the most of your time, it is a good idea to do some research now and have some ideas about where you want to go and how you are going to get there. When you arrive in London the AIFS Student Services staff will be able to give you plenty of advice and assistance. In the meantime if you have a question, please email us **studentinfo@aifs.co.uk**

By air

Over the last ten years there has been a revolution in cheap air travel throughout Europe. There are five airports surrounding London (Heathrow, Gatwick, London Luton, Stansted and London City) allowing you to get almost anywhere in Europe at reasonable prices. Heathrow is London's (and the UK's) main international airport, but flying to Europe, you will most likely be using Stansted, Luton or Gatwick, as this is where the low cost carriers fly from. The key to getting cheap deals is being flexible about departure times and booking as early as possible. Ryanair (**www.ryanair.com**) and easyJet (**www.easyjet.com**) are two of the most popular cheap airlines but be aware of the details. If you want to compare fares and options it's also worth checking out Skyscanner. (**www.skyscanner.net**).

By Train

Across Europe, the train is a great way of travelling, not as quick as the plane but in the current climate, certainly more relaxed, with no luggage restrictions or excessive security. For the cheapest deals, book in advance and try to avoid travelling on a Friday. In the UK you can look at **www.nationalrail.co.uk** to find details and prices of trains. The only discounts for students/young people are with a 16-25 Railcard (**www.16-25railcard.co.uk**). This is valid for a year but does require a one off payment of £30 to get 1/3 off rail fares for the year. It's only worth bothering with if you plan on doing a lot of rail travel in the UK.

A good starting point for train travel in mainland Europe is on **www.raileurope.com**. They have all the details on Eurail passes, which students have often used for post program travel. Once again, you would have to do quite a bit of travel to get full value.



St Pancras International Station

For details on the Eurostar service to Paris and Brussels have a look at **www.eurostar.com**. Look out for cheaper youth fares for people under 25 years of age. This is by far the best way to get to the French capital as it goes from Central London to Central Paris in about 2hrs 15min direct in some considerable luxury.

Further Research

Have a look at the following resources for further information.

Let's Go Travel Guides – Are aimed at students and are updated yearly.

www.letsgo.com

Lonely Planet – Make great travel guides and have a useful website.

www.lonelyplanet.com

Time Out – Good city guides and you can get newsletters by email.

www.timeout.com

Rough Guides – Good background information and tips.

www.roughguides.com

As in the USA there is also a network of STA travel agents around the UK. These are based around the student market with all of the staff having travelled extensively.

By Coach

You've all taken the Greyhound, haven't you? Yeah right? Anyway, often the cheapest way to get around Europe is using the coach. Be warned that it will take a while and might not be the most comfortable way of travel but you will get there, eventually. The UK coach network is vast, even when compared to the States. National Express (**www.nationalexpress.co.uk**) is the main provider but Megabus (**www.megabus.com**) also covers all of the UK and parts of Europe, often for cheaper. Another cheap coach company for Europe is Eurolines, **www.eurolines.com**

All the coaches have a bathroom, make regular stops and it can be a good opportunity to meet some interesting people! They also pick up and drop off right in the heart of the city.

Where to Stay

HOSTELS - Don't be afraid of staying in a hostel, it is the de-facto choice for young travellers in Europe. Modern hostels are full of the comforts of home; many have private rooms with bathrooms and are great places for meeting people. A good place to start is **www.hostelworld.com** as you can read what fellow travellers thought of the place. You may also want to look at Hostelling International (**www.hihostels.com**); the hostels on offer are slightly more traditional but are still comfortable. It is possible to become a member, offering discounts but not essential.

HOTELS - Of course there are a variety of hotels, guest houses, B&B's across Europe. The Student Services staff will give you as much help as possible. Please remember that rooms are much smaller than the US, rarely have Air Conditioning and if they are booked for one person that is the maximum number! Look at **www.booking.com** for some inspiration.



Whether it be a packed dorm room or a 5 star hotel, London, the UK and Europe are not spoilt for choice!



US Embassy Registration

For security reasons AIFS strongly advises all its students to register with the US State Department before leaving the US. We are unable to do this for you – you must do it individually on-line. You will need your passport information before you can do this.

Go to the following website: <https://step.state.gov/step/>



The screenshot shows the TRAVEL.STATE.GOV website, a service of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. The page has a blue header with the site name and navigation links: Newsroom | About Us | U.S. Embassies & Consulates | Help & Contacts. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Home | Create Account | Add Trip | Email Subscriptions | Contact Us. The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column is titled 'Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)' and describes the program as a free service for U.S. citizens traveling or living abroad. It includes a link for 'More Information/FAQ'. The middle column is titled 'What Can You Do With STEP?' and lists two bullet points: 'Enter information on your trip or overseas residence' and 'Subscribe to receive updates on Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts and other information for a particular country'. The right column is titled 'If you have an account, please login here:' and contains a 'User ID' field, a 'Password' field, and a 'Log In' button. There are also links for 'Forgot User ID?' and 'Forgot Password?'. At the bottom of the page, there is a section titled 'Smart Traveler Enrollment Program and Privacy' which states that the U.S. Department of State is committed to ensuring that any personal information received by its overseas embassies and consulates is safeguarded against unauthorized disclosure. A small blue arrow icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the privacy section.

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U.S. Department of State

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Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)
The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country.
STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency.
STEP also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.
[More Information/FAQ](#)

What Can You Do With STEP?

- Enter information on your trip or overseas residence
- Subscribe to receive updates on Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts and other information for a particular country

If you have an account, please login here:

User ID

[Forgot User ID?](#)

Password

[Forgot Password?](#)

[If not, click here to create an account](#)

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program and Privacy
The U.S. Department of State is committed to ensuring that any personal information received by our overseas embassies and consulates pursuant to the STEP process, whether in person or otherwise, is safeguarded against unauthorized disclosure. The data that you provided the U.S. Department of State is subject to the provisions of the Privacy Act (5 USC 552a). This means that the U.S. Department of State will not disclose the information you provide us in your STEP application to any third parties unless you have given us written authorization to do so, or unless the disclosure is otherwise permitted by the Privacy Act.

- You will firstly need to create an account. Click on **Create Individual Account**. Fill out the password and security information – note this down and keep it somewhere safe. Fill out as many details as possible.
- **Passport information.**
- **Emergency contact information** – please enter as much information as possible to allow the State Department to contact your next of kin in the event of an emergency while you are abroad.

- **Privacy information** – this is at your own discretion but it is advisable that you allow family members to have access to this information in the event of an emergency.
- **Confirm your account details** and print for your records.
- This will now take you back to your **Profile Information**. From here you should click on Add a Trip; this will take you to the Itinerary page.
- **Destination Info** – please enter as follows:

<u>Country:</u>	United Kingdom
<u>Local Embassy:</u>	London
<u>Type of Visit:</u>	Extended Stay
<u>Date of Arrival and Departure:</u>	please enter the dates of your program
<u>Purpose of Visit:</u>	please enter "Study Abroad" plus the name of your home college
- **Address Info** – please enter as follows:

<u>Destination Type:</u>	School
<u>Address Line 1:</u>	AIFS
<u>Address Line 2:</u>	Dilke House, 1 Malet Street
<u>City:</u>	London
<u>Postal Code:</u>	WC1E 7JN
<u>Country:</u>	United Kingdom
<u>Phone number:</u>	020 7636 0761
- **Travellers** – please enter your own information. One form of contact information must be entered here – home address, telephone number, e mail address, fax number.
- **Email list** – add your email address if you would like to be kept up to receive email Travel Warnings, Public Announcements and other information from the State Department.
- You will then see any relevant information recently issued about your destination country.
- Finally you should confirm the summary of information. When you click on Finish it will take you back to the Profile page from where you can logout or add other trips if necessary.

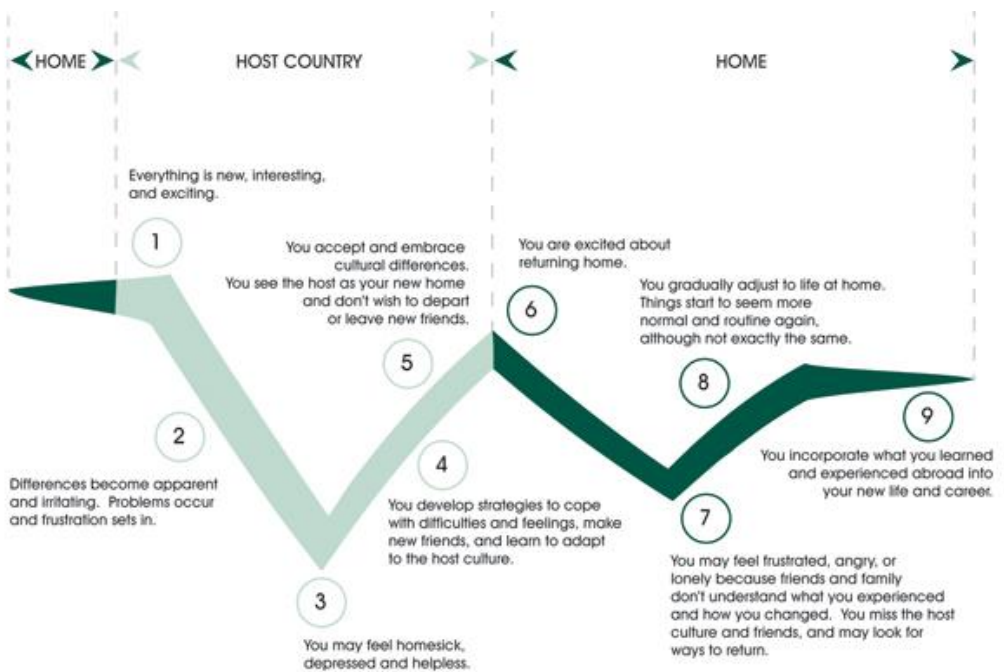
If you have any difficulty with the above process or are unable to complete the registration please contact AIFS in London at **studentinfo@aifs.co.uk**.

Culture Shock

Study Abroad can be a wonderfully exciting, rewarding, culturally enlightening and expanding experience, not forgetting what a great opportunity it is for personal growth! However it can, at times, also be a stressful experience. Students are at a stage where a lot of transitions are taking place in their lives, and all students will experience and deal with these transitions in different ways. All transitions have common symptoms and stages - the symptoms may include irritability, frustration, disorientation, helplessness and withdrawal. In transition experiences, first we may *fight* that which is new, or we may choose to take *flight* to escape the challenging situation. We may literally leave the environment or withdraw internally. What may initially appear to be a crisis is just a normal developmental phase of adjustment known as 'culture shock'. We believe, the more you know about 'culture shock' the more equipped you will be to understand and deal with it. The UK and the US may have many similarities but the famous saying goes that we are **"two nations divided by a common language"**. The cultures, values, beliefs, communications, and way of life of our two great nations can be vastly differing.

What is 'culture shock'? We could list many academic definitions but, to put it plainly, 'culture shock' can be defined as **a clash between our own views of the world (which are determined by our home culture) and our new cultural environment**. It can feel like we have a lack of control, that we are helpless in this new culture. 'Culture shock' is a developmental phase that is common amongst study abroad students; it is normal to experience it. Culture shock is also often described as an adjustment cycle, initially we feel really excited and optimistic about going on a study abroad, we can't wait to get to the country we will be calling home for the next semester. This is the high point of the cycle or, what is often referred to as the 'honeymoon stage'. Then we hit the second phase or the low point of the cycle, 'the disintegration or crisis stage' where all we can see is difference, but not in a positive way; nothing works in the same way, food is different (something you will notice in the UK), it's not like home, we begin to miss our support system and all our creature comforts.

We have to navigate our way through a culture that has different rules, behaviours, food and language (even when initially it seems that we share a common one!), and it can really feel like an uphill struggle. 'Culture shock' is about this struggle to become culturally competent in a different culture. This is perfectly natural, and it can help us to learn and grow from the experience. Because it is a developmental process, how long and how we work through it depends on what resources we have available to us. Some individuals will seem to have no problems adjusting while for others it can be a real struggle. The W-curve (see below) provides a good illustration of the stages of adjustment which one may experience.



- **Honeymoon Phase** – occurs when you first arrive in a new culture. The excitement of being somewhere new and different...I mean, come on it's London!
- **Cultural Shock** - may be noticeable after a few days or weeks. Those initially exciting cultural differences and quirks the British have may now cause you to feel insecure or confused, as you struggle to understand the rules of the new culture you find yourself in. At this stage, you may find you miss your family and home support structures the most.
- **Initial Adjustment** - you may find you feel irritated, or frustrated with the cultural differences you come across in daily life: perhaps with the learning and teaching environment, or in your relationships with staff or other students, or with your accommodation. You will probably find you make comparisons with your home culture and decide you prefer home! You may be consciously or unconsciously assessing your own cultural values and trying to make sense of them.
- **Mental Isolation** - you will by now probably worked out how to operate in your new cultural environment - how to satisfactorily interact with people and make friends, where to shop, eat and socialize, as well as to understand and cope with your new learning environment. You will most likely start to accept the differences between your home culture and those of the UK and Europe and to feel more relaxed.
- **Acceptance and Integration** - brings with it a feeling of self-assurance and more complete understanding of your home and the new culture. Differences and similarities are valued and important and you feel confident about handling most or all situations.

It is important to remember not everyone will experience the above, some will for differing lengths of time, and some may only experience parts of the W-curve. To help ease the transition keep in touch with your home country, ensure you take care of yourself and talk to someone about how you are feeling. And remember what you may experience is normal and that other students will be feeling the same way as you.

This is just a guide to help you to understand some of the emotions you may encounter during your time abroad. If you have any questions or would like any further information about dealing with culture shock please email us at **studentinfo@aifs.co.uk** or come and speak to the AIFS staff when you are in London.

The Student Services staff have travelled all over the globe and themselves have experienced the best and worst of exploring new cultures. We can provide for you sound advice to dealing with all aspects of culture shock.

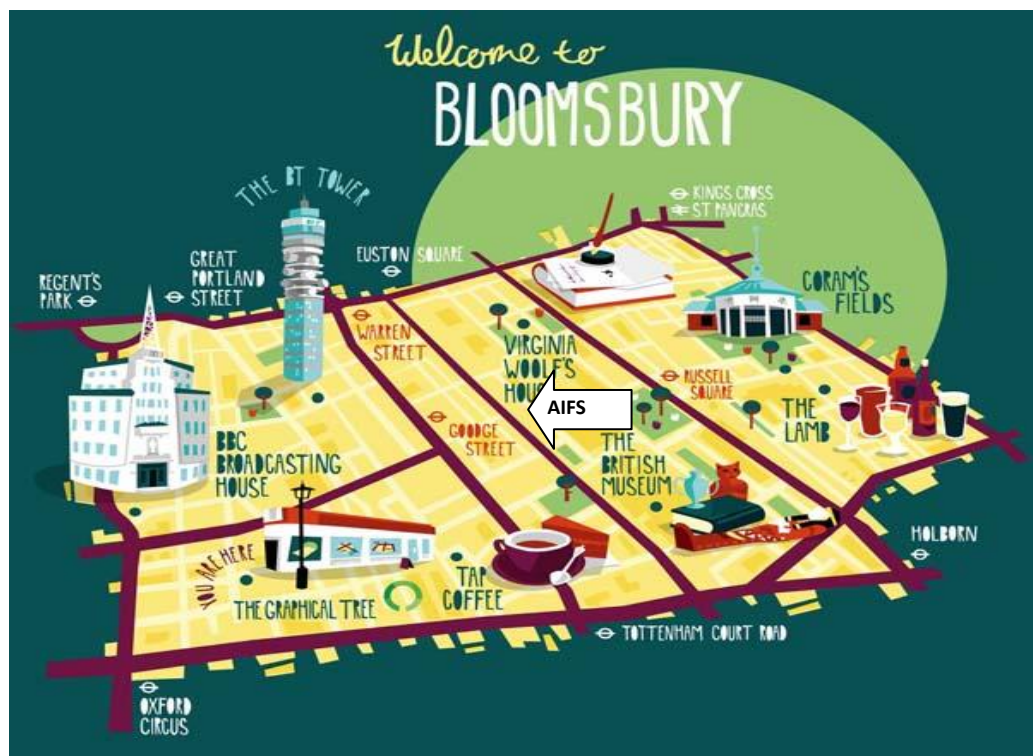


Local Maps

The final next two pages are just a couple of maps to give you a feel of London and your respective neighbourhoods.

We recommend that you do some research before you head here about travelling in London, as for some first timers this can be a daunting task. Also get to know the beautiful and lively Bloomsbury area, right in the heart of Central London. AIFS Dilke House is right at the heart of literary and educational London, with the University of London's best schools based in the area. These include University College London, Birkbeck, the School of African and Oriental Studies, and right next to Dilke House is the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which houses a great little cafe. The Bloomsbury area is synonymous with literary and artistic greats such as Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, and JM Barrie. Oh and lets not forget that you have one of the world's greatest civic institution on your doorstep, the British Museum.

Finally one of the most emblematic symbols of the city, the Tube. The world's oldest and one of the largest, when you are here you will become very familiar with it, whether you like it or not!



Central London Tube Map

