



# BARCELONA PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK

2023





WELCOME!

To help you prepare for your upcoming study abroad program we have put together this handbook. In it we will provide you with information to help optimize your study abroad experience and get you set for life in Barcelona.

We recommend that you do the following:

- Read all the information thoroughly.
- Refer to all websites cited in the handbook.

If you have a question to which you can't find an answer in the handbook, then please don't hesitate to contact us.

**Your AIFS Team in the U.S.**

**CFL Admissions**  
American Institute For Foreign Study  
1 High Ridge Park  
Stamford, CT 06905  
Tel: **800-727-2437**  
Fax: **(203) 399-5597**  
E-mail: [customizedfacultylead@aifs.com](mailto:customizedfacultylead@aifs.com)

*Ensure you have completed your pre-program to-do list by logging onto the AIFS portal via [www.aifscustomized.com](http://www.aifscustomized.com)*

**Your AIFS Team in Barcelona**

**AIFS Barcelona**  
C/ Casp, 37 1º2ª  
08010 Barcelona, Spain  
Office: **(011 34) 93 667 44 49**  
24 hr Duty cell phone: **(011 34) 669 74 74 79**  
E-mail: [barcelona@aifs.co.uk](mailto:barcelona@aifs.co.uk)

The AIFS Barcelona team includes a Resident Director, Head of Student Services and a team of Student Advisors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION ..... 2

BEFORE YOU GO! ..... 2

PREPARING TO LEAVE ..... 3

PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION ..... 3

WHAT TO BRING ..... 3

BAGGAGE INFORMATION ..... 4

MEDICAL AND MEDICATION ..... 4

ON LOCATION ..... 5

TRAVEL TO BARCELONA ..... 5

AN INTRODUCTION TO BARCELONA ..... 6

CULTURE SHOCK ..... 8

HOUSING AND MEALS ..... 13

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION ..... 16

COMMUNICATIONS ABROAD ..... 17

MONEY MATTERS ..... 19

HEALTH AND SAFETY WHILE ABROAD ..... 21

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION ..... 24

PACKING LIST ..... 25



## EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

AIFS is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the duration of your program in both the U.S. and on campus. If a crisis arises and your family needs to contact you or if you need to reach AIFS staff yourself in an emergency, then use these numbers:

### Emergency number in U.S.

**1-800-727-2437** from U.S.

**1-203-399-5000** from outside the U.S.

During non-business hours, you will be connected to the AIFS Emergency Answering Service. Please use this Emergency Answering Service only in a true emergency.

### Emergency numbers in Barcelona

**669 74 74 79** (from a Spanish phone)

**011 34 669 74 74 79** (from a U.S. phone)

### Medical or security related emergency

In cases of medical or security related emergency students should contact our 24-7 emergency assistance provider, On Call International (Team Assist) on:

- **(877) 714-8179** (calling toll-free from within the US)
- **001 (603) 952-2660** (calling from outside of the US, collect calls accepted)

E-mail: [mail@oncallinternational.com](mailto:mail@oncallinternational.com)

Please quote: **Policy CC008316-LT.**

Always remember to inform AIFS staff if you are ill and to keep receipts for medication, doctor's and/or hospital appointments for insurance claim purposes.

### Emergency services in Spain

Emergency **112**

Police **091**

### U.S. Embassy

U.S. Embassy in Madrid **91 587 2240**

U.S. Consulate in Barcelona **93 280 2227**

Details of U.S. Embassies, Consulates and Diplomatic Missions and their emergency services:

[www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov)

## BEFORE YOU GO!

### To-Do List:

- Read through the information on your AIFS student portal: [www.aifsabroad.com/login](http://www.aifsabroad.com/login)
- Address all document requests on your AIFS student portal: [www.aifsabroad.com/login](http://www.aifsabroad.com/login)
- Apply for - or renew - your passport (if necessary)
- Apply for a visa (if necessary, see page 2)
- See your physician and complete the Medical Exam Form (see page 3)
- Visit the U.S. Department of State's website for students going abroad:  
[travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html](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/>
- Download the CISI mobile app at:  
[www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp)
- Order enough medication to last the entirety of your stay abroad
- Consult your airline's baggage allowance guidelines
- Start planning what you're going to pack
- Buy a Barcelona tourist guidebook
- Notify your bank if you are planning to use your bank card abroad
- Contact your cell phone provider for information about using your cell abroad (see the Communications Abroad section)
- Give contact details or a copy of this handbook to your guardians
- Read some student blogs and posts about the place you are visiting: <http://blog.aifsabroad.com/> (see Share Your Experience)

## PREPARING TO LEAVE

### Your AIFS Team in the U.S.

#### CFL Admissions

American Institute For Foreign Study

1 High Ridge Park

Stamford, CT 06905

Tel: **800-727-2437**

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

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

*Karen is your main point of contact and coordinates all pre-departure program aspects*

## PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION

### Passports

All students are required to have a valid passport to participate in a study abroad program. For information about obtaining a new passport or renewing an existing passport, please visit the U.S. Department of State's website at: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

If you have not yet applied for your passport, please do so using the expedited service. To check on the status of a passport application, please call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778.

Please note - your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after your program ends.

### Visas

U.S. citizens with valid U.S. passports do not require a visa when visiting Spain for stays of up to 90 days. If your program is longer than 90 days, you must apply for a student visa. Upon acceptance AIFS will provide instructions however, students must contact the Spanish Consulate directly for the appropriate visa forms. Non-U.S. citizens are responsible for obtaining a visa as required.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Useful websites

[lonelyplanet.com/spain/Barcelona](http://lonelyplanet.com/spain/Barcelona)

[timeout.com/barcelona](http://timeout.com/barcelona)

## WHAT TO BRING

### Pack Lightly!

Bring as little as you possibly can. Try not to bring more than one large suitcase and one weekend bag. If you bring extremely heavy luggage then you will regret it. For the first few days, you will have to carry everything you pack through airports, onto buses, up flights of stairs, etc. **Above all, do not pack more than you can carry.** We cannot stress this enough.

AIFS strongly suggests that students leave any valuables and large sums of cash at home. Students are responsible for their personal belongings for the duration of their program. You can pack whatever type of clothing you feel most comfortable in, just be practical. Stick with basics that can be paired together to create several outfits.

Luggage sometimes gets delayed or lost so as a precaution, AIFS recommends that you pack a carry-on bag with anything you might need in case your luggage is lost e.g. a change of clothes, medicines, basic toiletries.

Start planning what you will pack by reading the baggage allowance guidelines and the packing list at the end of the handbook. The Barcelona weather and climate can be checked at [weather-and-climate.com](http://weather-and-climate.com).

### Linens

Linens and bedding are provided, but you should pack a towel. You may need to purchase a blanket.

### Course Supplies

Books are expensive in Spain, so AIFS recommends you download a Spanish dictionary app and purchase any other necessary resources. If you have a good Spanish grammar book in English, it is advisable to bring it with you. Supplies such as notebook and pens can be purchased on site. See the Money Matters section for more details.



## BAGGAGE INFORMATION

---

### Baggage Allowances

International airline carriers expect passengers to adhere to their baggage allowance for trans-Atlantic flights. Airlines often charge a penalty fee for overweight or excess baggage. The fees vary from airline to airline, and in some cases airlines will refuse to take excess pieces or overweight luggage.

Please contact your airline directly for information regarding luggage restrictions and baggage allowances. As baggage allowance policies are set by the airlines and not by AIFS, AIFS accepts no responsibility for changes in airline luggage policy and does not pay for extra/overweight baggage fees under any circumstances.

Most intercontinental airlines also allow one standard size carry-on and one small accessory which can be a small purse, laptop bag or camera bag.

Remember that:

- Baggage allowances for flights within Europe are often more restrictive than trans-Atlantic flights
- When connecting from trans-Atlantic to intra-European flights or flights within other countries, you are subject to other carrier's baggage allowance restrictions as well
- Airline carriers can alter baggage allowance policies without notice
- Overweight baggage fees are determined by the airline and are solely your responsibility

### Baggage Insurance

Personal effects are covered up to \$3,000 with a \$50 deductible. Some exclusions apply. Refer to the CISI insurance policy on your AIFS student portal for further details.

## MEDICAL AND MEDICATION

---

Students are required to have a medical exam and have their physician complete a Medical Exam form. This form is available on your AIFS student portal. AIFS will not send your plane tickets until they have received the completed form.

In addition, make sure your childhood immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria-tetanus, etc.) are up-to-date.

If you take **prescription medications** on a regular basis you should remember to:

- Carry a note from your doctor stating your medical condition, the purpose of the medication, dosage information and the brand and generic names of the medication. This is especially necessary if you will be carrying insulin, syringes or narcotics.
- Keep all medications in their original containers with your name clearly printed on the labels.
- Pack all prescription medication in your carry-on luggage in case your packed luggage is lost or delayed during the flight.
- Bring enough of your medication to last your entire stay abroad. Prescriptions written in the U.S. cannot be filled in elsewhere. Getting a local doctor abroad to prescribe you the medication can be a long and expensive process.
- **Please note:** Some medications may be illegal in the country you are staying so you will not be able to purchase them there. You must bring enough of your medication with you for the whole program.
- Do not ask anyone to send you prescription drugs, vitamins, contact lenses and cosmetics. Due to customs restrictions, medication cannot be shipped overseas.

### Toiletries

You will be able to buy all your health and beauty aids abroad, you just might not find your favorite brands. Bring the basics you use every day in travel-sized containers.

Prepare a medical kit with your favorite over-the-counter pain reliever, cold medication, vitamins, etc., which also may not be available abroad.

For contact lens users, bring a supply of all the necessary solutions for the duration of the program. They cost several times more than what you pay for them in the U.S.

Please note that due to restrictions in the amounts of liquids allowed on carry-on luggage on some airlines, you should pack liquids in the checked luggage.

### TRAVEL TO BARCELONA

---

#### Flight information/tickets

For students selecting the AIFS Flight Package, a detailed flight itinerary will be available on your AIFS student portal once your flight has been booked. Your electronic ticket information will be sent to your home address via express delivery service approximately one week prior to your departure date (provided all necessary forms and payments have been received by AIFS).

#### Making a return date change with AIFS flight package

Return date changes after tickets have been issued may, in some instances, be made through your AIFS student portal at [www.aifsabroad.com/login](http://www.aifsabroad.com/login). Changes are subject to airline availability and not guaranteed. There will be a \$350 change fee and additional fees/penalties may be assessed by the airline. Date changes only are permitted. Routing changes are prohibited by the airline. Please visit [www.aifsabroad.com/login](http://www.aifsabroad.com/login) after arrival on campus for further instructions.

#### Arrival in Barcelona with AIFS Flight Package

Students who are flying with AIFS will be met at the airport by AIFS staff. For security reasons, AIFS staff are not allowed to enter the arrivals area of the airport terminal. Students must collect their own baggage and exit the arrivals area after clearing customs and passport control.

The program representative will be waiting for you outside the arrivals area with a large sign that says AIFS. You will be transferred to your accommodation.

Airports are always very crowded so please walk slowly when you exit the arrivals area and keep your eyes open for an AIFS representative holding identification signs. If you don't spot AIFS staff at first don't worry, they will be there in the crowd waiting for you. Do not attempt to make your own way to your accommodation.

If your flight has been delayed, please contact AIFS staff in the U.S. prior to take off by calling 1-800-727-2437. Staff in Barcelona will be informed and will know when to expect you.

#### Lost or Delayed Luggage

If your luggage has been lost or delayed, do not leave the baggage reclaim area without filing a lost luggage report with the airline. Make sure you are given a reference and contact number for your claim.

When filling in a claim you should give the address of the AIFS Barcelona office unless you are advised differently closer to departure. The luggage will then be delivered to us.

AIFS recommends that you pack a carry-on bag with anything you might need for the first day in case your luggage is delayed.

Since staff are not allowed into baggage claims and customs, and airlines will not confirm the names of passengers on planes, it is impossible for staff to know if a scheduled student missed their flight or is just waiting to file a lost baggage claim. Therefore, please be sure that another member in the group informs AIFS staff of the names of any student still waiting in the baggage hall.





## Arrival in Barcelona independently “Own Travel”

**Students making their own flight arrangements must fill out the Own Travel form on their AIFS student portal.**

If you are making your own travel arrangements, you must arrange your flights according to the dates listed on your home institution website for this program.

Please remember the time difference when you book your flights. You must allow enough time to travel and must take into account the local time at your destination. Check your flight arrival date and time before booking. You should plan to arrive in Barcelona not later than 2pm, local time.

If your flight information changes after you submit your Own Travel form, please notify your AIFS Program Manager in Stamford and the AIFS Abroad team.

If you are making your own flight arrangements the transfers to and from campus are not included. You will need to make your own way to your accommodation. You will be provided with more details closer to the start of the program.

**If you are traveling independently, you should have at least €150 with you in cash to cover costs or emergencies.**

## Changing your Return Flight for Own Travel Students

If you have made your own flight arrangements, please make sure you bring a copy of all of your flight booking details as AIFS staff cannot assist you with altering your return date or other flight arrangements. Flight changes are done entirely at the airline’s discretion and are subject to the airline’s rules, regulations and availability. Airlines usually charge up to \$350 for date changes. Routing changes are not permitted.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO BARCELONA

Barcelona is Spain’s second largest city and its most cosmopolitan. From the surreal Modernist buildings, among them Gaudí’s *Sagrada Família* church (famously still under construction), to the dynamic business center and the bustling seafront looking out onto the Mediterranean, it is easy to understand Barcelona’s immense popularity.

The city’s origins can be traced back to the first century BC and the Roman colony of *Barcino*. 2,000 years of history have left their mark on Barcelona’s architectural, artistic and cultural heritage. Its Mediterranean climate, excellent location for international travel and feel for the avant-garde make Barcelona the perfect place to study abroad.

Barcelona has long been a center for innovation in art, architecture and style since the 19th century, and now adds tech and science to its industries. There is steady investment in new technologies and support for start-ups and research.

## Population and Districts

Located on the coast of Northeastern Spain, the city is nestled between the beach and mountains, resulting in a densely populated inner city. 1.6 million people live within city limits, with almost 5.5 million people within the greater metropolitan area.

The city is divided into ten administrative districts: *Ciutat Vella, Eixample, Sants-Montjuïc, Les Corts, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Gràcia, Horta-Guinardó, Nou Barris, Sant Andreu and Sant Martí*. These districts are connected by a metro network of 12 lines, as well as bus lines and regional trains- around 1 million people travel on the metro each day.

## Language and Demographics

Spanish is the most spoken language in Barcelona, and Catalan is also very commonly spoken. Catalan was officially recognized as an official language when Spain transitioned from the rule of Franco to democracy (1975-1982). It is currently taught in all schools in Catalunya and is heavily promoted by the autonomous government.

Barcelona is very diverse, attracting migrant communities from other European countries, South America, and Asia. While Spain is traditionally a Catholic country, fewer than 50% of the city’s inhabitants are actively identified as following a religion. Barcelona has large Muslim and Jewish communities.

## Sport and Culture

Barcelona hosted the Olympics in 1992 and is also famous for its world-class soccer team, FC Barcelona. The team have enjoyed many successes and regularly win both national and European competition titles. Many FCB players were part of the national team when Spain won the world cup in 2010. The Barcelona marathon usually takes place in March, attracting over 13,000 runners. In October, you will find the Triathlon taking place down at the beach, where you can also admire the marina and watch numerous regattas take place throughout the year.

Barcelona attracts many world-famous music groups and has many venues for live music and theater. The *Gran Teatre del Liceu* and the *Palau de la Musica* are beautiful historic venues for classical concerts and Opera.

Each September, Barcelona celebrates *La Mercè*, a long weekend of celebrations to honor their patron saint- Our Lady of the Mercy. Following a free program of events, spectators enjoy parades, dance exhibitions, concerts, and *Castellers* (human pyramids!) competitions throughout the city.

## Time Zones

Barcelona is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time.

## Climate

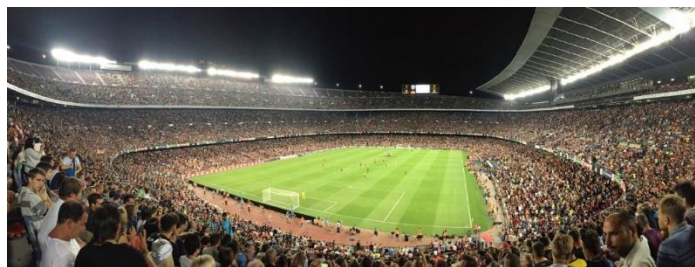
As Barcelona is a coastal city in the Mediterranean, it enjoys an extremely pleasant climate for much of the year. Generally speaking, from early April to late September, light, summery clothing is in order. Things get toasty at the height of summer, in July and August, with daytime highs above 86 °F. Beach time!

Winters in Barcelona aren't as cold as the other parts of Spain but you'll still need to wrap up (it actually snowed in Barcelona in early 2023, although this was highly unusual). Average day temperatures in December and January are around 50°F. Crisp, bright days help provide a winter wonderland feel at the Christmas markets in front of the Cathedral!

The weather in Barcelona is predominantly dry, but it's not unusual to wake up to the odd rainy day. Storm systems can hit the city in early Spring and late Fall but they're not of the extreme sort. For more information on Barcelona's weather and climate check out: [weather-and-climate.com](https://www.weather-and-climate.com)

## Orientation

Soon after arrival, all students will have an orientation meeting. At the meeting, students will receive information about life in Barcelona, academic matters and social activities. Students will also have the opportunity to ask questions about anything that they're concerned about.





## CULTURE SHOCK

---

Studying abroad can be a wonderfully exciting, rewarding, culturally enlightening and expanding experience. However, it can, at times, also be a stressful experience.

You will encounter many new and sometimes confusing situations while studying abroad. Culture shock is a type of stress that results from trying to cope with these situations, maybe using a different language and following different customs. 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 you have a lack of control and that you are helpless in this new culture.

Almost every traveler who spends an extended period away from home experiences culture shock to some degree. You are outside of your comfort zone and as a result, you may feel frustrated, depressed or even sick.

Culture shock is also often described as an adjustment cycle. Initially you feel really excited and optimistic about going to study abroad and can't wait to get to the country you will be calling home. This is the high point of the cycle or, what is often referred to as the 'honeymoon stage'. Then you may hit the second phase or the low point of the cycle, 'the crisis stage' where you may see all the differences and may begin to miss the support system and familiarity of home.

Culture shock is about the struggle to become culturally competent in a different culture. It is perfectly natural, and it can help you to learn and grow from the experience. As it is a developmental process, how long it takes and how you work through it depends on what resources you have available. Some individuals will seem to have no problems adjusting whilst for others it can be a real struggle.

There is a similar adjustment required when returning home, referred to as reverse culture shock or re-entry shock. It relates to the process of readjusting and reassimilating into one's home culture after living in another culture. Expect to take time to adjust to home life again when you get back home.

Most of the stress-causing differences between home and the host culture will be obvious to you right away: disruption of your normal daily routine, the distance

between you and family and friends, new food, different language, the climate, etc. Other differences between your culture and the host culture are not so obvious but can also cause stress. This can include how people make decisions and resolve problems, interaction with your professors, how recreational time is spent, customer service and business practices, and the type of body language people use. Getting used to all this can cause a considerable amount of anxiety.

If you go abroad expecting everything to be a certain way you will be disappointed. Keep an open mind and expect the unexpected. Everything about your daily routine is about to change from the educational system to what time you will eat dinner. Be flexible and open to new things. Remember that one of the main reasons for study abroad for most students is to integrate into the culture. You can't integrate if you expect everything to be like it is at home.

Since everyone handles things differently, there is no "formula" for dealing with culture shock. The way you deal with it will be different from others but there are things that you can do that will make the adjustment easier. It does help to know that it happens to everyone in one way or another.



Knowing that you may experience culture shock at some point during your stay abroad, you can take some positive steps to prepare yourself:

- Accept the differences. In order to acclimate you are going to have to find a way to live with the things that you are not in 100% agreement with about the new culture. This goes for the host country's attitude towards punctuality and customer service, the food and the educational system. These are some of the things that make up the culture and they are not going to change because you don't like them.
- Be patient. You are not going to get used to living abroad in a couple of days or even a couple of weeks. Adjustment takes time.
- Keep an open mind. Relax and accept things as they are. You might end up appreciating the host culture's way of doing things or at least develop an appreciation for how things are done at home.
- Pay attention to cultural differences. Social customs vary widely from one culture to another and there is no way to "fit in" until you learn what is (and is not) appropriate behavior. You will learn this by paying attention to the actions of those around you.
- Make good use of your free time. Maybe you were used to a rigid schedule at home and you are having a hard time adjusting to a slower pace. See as much of the city and country as you can. You may never have the chance to relax this much again so enjoy it.
- Get some exercise. If you are used to exercising at home keep it up while you are abroad. Exercise will help you battle culture shock in a constructive way. Go for a run or join a gym.



## Mental Health and Practicing Wellness Abroad

One of the best things you can do before departure is enter into the experience knowing that your time abroad will be different than on your home campus. The resources, community and support available to you abroad will be different than your home campus as well. With that in mind, here are some ways you can take care of yourself and manage your mental health while abroad:

- Let your AIFS team know if you are experiencing challenges. Being able to speak to someone about your experience can often be helpful. They can provide tips and resources for navigating this new environment.
- Keep a journal about your time abroad. Being able to write down how you are feeling can be helpful for processing your experience and providing clarity for navigating challenging situations.
- Notice if specific locations or situations increase your stress and anxiety. Once you have identified triggers, do your best to avoid or prepare for them.
- Practice self-care. Being in an unfamiliar environment can be equal parts exciting and exhausting. Make sure you take moments to be alone as needed and know your limits for socializing and engaging in energy-draining activities.
- Exercise and/or get outside. Fresh air can do wonders for positively altering your mood and help you find new places to appreciate in your host community.
- Remember that your time abroad is limited. Try to be present in the experience and make a list of any foods, activities and locations you want to experience while abroad and focus on working your way through that list.





## Bringing Your Whole Self Abroad

At AIFS, we support students of all backgrounds, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Diversity and inclusion are important in every aspect of your study abroad experience. You will be experiencing a new culture, which may have different attitudes towards diversity and aspects of your identity than what you are used to at your home campus and in your local community. It may be more open, it may be less. As an individual, it is essential to be respectful of others. This notion applies to the locals you will meet, other international students, your homestay family and/or roommates, and participants within your AIFS program.

Although we have no control over the attitudes or actions of your host culture, our staff abroad will do their best to help you understand the cultural norms and provide resources and information whenever possible. If you are unsure how to navigate an aspect of the host culture, please ask your AIFS Team to help guide you. They are there to provide assistance throughout your study abroad journey and will do everything they can to ensure that you have a positive and safe experience. Please keep in mind that available resources and accommodations will vary, depending on the location.

Our student resources website

[www.aifsabroad.com/student-resources.asp](http://www.aifsabroad.com/student-resources.asp)

features additional information and accommodation forms for you to communicate any specific support you need during your time abroad. We encourage you to download and complete the appropriate form(s) from the site and return them to the Program Manager for your AIFS study abroad program. Letting us know before you arrive abroad will allow us to better assist you throughout your study abroad experience.



## Information and Resources Specific to Barcelona for Diverse Identities and Communities

This information is gathered annually from on-site staff, university partners and from the Diversity Abroad Climate Notes.

**Access and Mobility:** If you have mobility limitations or concerns, please let AIFS know before your arrival so they can work with you directly. Students who require access to medications should ensure their prescriptions are legally permitted in country. Barcelona is well-equipped to welcome students with disabilities and AIFS on-site staff are available to provide support and advice throughout your time abroad.

Most crosswalks have auditory and visual signals, and ramps, especially in the central district. Buses and most of the subway stations are well-prepared for individuals with physical disabilities. Big shopping centers such as “El Corte Ingles” or “Primark” have ramps, elevators and accessible public toilets for individuals with disabilities.

Apart from that, many restaurants and bars in the city center follow the requirements necessary to fulfill the needs of clients with disabilities. In general terms, the public places are very well equipped for accessibility. Please keep in mind that in neighborhoods away from the central district it is less common to see accessible facilities. This is due to the smaller amounts of people who circulate in outlying areas in comparison with the central district.

**Adult Students:** Since Barcelona is such a cosmopolitan city, there is a wide range of clubs and groups where an older student can feel comfortable in. In general terms, Spanish people are very open, and it is quite common to see a mix of people of different ages in a same group. As previously mentioned, Barcelona has really good offers for everybody. The AIFS staff is willing to help students find a club or organization that fit best according to their interests and likes.

**First Generation:** The designation of being a first-generation college student is not as prominent a social identity in Spain as it is in the US, so specific resources related to this in-country might be harder to find. Your AIFS Team is available to support you with any questions or concerns you might have as you navigate your study abroad experience.

**LGBTQI+:** Spain is widely considered a progressive country that protects gay and minority rights. Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2005 and although the country is predominantly Catholic, the influence of conservative groups on social policy is not as strong as in other traditionally Catholic European nations.

Barcelona has its own LGBTQI+ neighborhood within the central *Eixample*. However, you needn't feel inhibited in expressing your identity regardless of the neighborhood. Barcelona is a very open-minded place and bars, pubs, clubs, restaurants, and shops are mostly very open to all the community. In all parts of the city, it's common to see gay couples holding hands or kissing on the streets. Whatever your sexual orientation or however you identify, you will be made to feel welcome in Barcelona.

There is a public organization called ACCEM that depends on the *Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad*. This organization handles complaints related to gender discrimination and racism. Even though the overall climate toward members of the LGBTQI+ community is supportive, please notify AIFS on-site staff immediately of any incidents or if you should happen to feel unsafe at all.



**Neurological Diversity:** If you have neurological, intellectual or cognitive limitations or mental health concerns, please let AIFS know any accommodations you require before your arrival so they can work with you directly. Students who require access to medications

should ensure their prescriptions are legally permitted in country.

We understand that although studying abroad is usually an exciting adventure for everyone, it can also be an unsettling period. It is not unusual for students to feel a little overwhelmed by the experience. Feelings of anxiety, depression and/or stress are not uncommon. Students who experience this in-country are encouraged to connect with their AIFS Team for resources and if you feel you need professional help while in Spain. The insurance included in the AIFS program includes access to two professional psychologists who are used to working with international students.

**Race and Ethnicity:** Barcelona has a lot of immigration from other European countries, Asia, Latin America and Africa, and it makes the city a multicultural and cosmopolitan city. However, there are still some points to consider.

Students of color may be one of the few minority members within their program and thus study and live with individuals who have limited understanding of their cultures and cannot provide adequate support. Although most U.S. travelers of color to Spain do not report experiencing racist interactions, minor encounters of racist prejudice or epithets are not uncommon in Spanish public life.

Unfortunately, due to the several issues with religious fundamentalism sometimes people from Arabic countries that are very traditional in appearance could be viewed with distrust or fear. However, Spain has a lot of Arabic immigrants who live peacefully with the Spaniards, especially in the south.

Thanks to the huge number of students from Europe, Latin-America, China, Korea, Japan and Africa, people choose to study in Barcelona due to its friendly atmosphere with the cultures from other parts of the world. However, please notify AIFS on-site staff immediately of any incidents that make you uncomfortable or if you should happen to feel unsafe at all.

**Religion:** Although Catholicism is the main religion in Spain, students of all denominations should feel comfortable practicing their faith. Your AIFS team can provide you with information on places of worship for all faiths in Barcelona.



Catholicism has been the official religion of Spain from XV century until 1931, and between 1939 and 1978. Spain has been declared as a laic country in 1978, with the constitutional proclamation of worship freedom. Currently, even though most people are Catholics, almost half of the population does not practice their religion.

Due to this fact, Spain is very welcoming to those of other religions, such as Muslims, Jewish (there are very few Jewish left), evangelical (a minority within Christianity), and Islam (a very few minority). A significant part of the population, particularly young people are atheists or agnostics.

There is a curiosity about Spain and its religious bonds. As mentioned before, most people are Catholics, but they are not used to visiting church or follow the rules of Catholicism itself. However, this country celebrates with huge enthusiasm all catholic saints and all the important events set by the church. Most people are very respectful of these celebrations. Many young people tend to use the saint's celebration to hang out with friend and have fun, more than to celebrate the saint's day itself.

As regards Barcelona, since it is a large city there are people from all religions that get along with peacefully. It is common to see Muslims and Catholics walking on the streets or sharing space together without any problem. In this city there are specific public organizations, such as ACCEM, that depends on a state agency (*Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad*). ACCEM is in charge of protecting citizens from any kind of discrimination as regards religion, gender or racial. This organization receives complaints, and it also offers the service of experts on this matter. Please notify us immediately of any incidents or if you should happen to feel unsafe at all.

**Students on a Budget:** There are tons of opportunities to explore life in Barcelona that are reduced cost (or free) for students. A university student's card (ISIC) will allow you free entrance into certain museums in Barcelona, such as the *Museu Picasso* or *Museu Maritim* (also true of the world-famous *Prado* and *Reina Sofia*, in Madrid). On the first Sunday of the month many museums are also free to the general public, for example, the iconic MNAC art gallery which towers above *Plaça d'Espanya*.

More than most cities, walking the streets of Barcelona

(and exploring its neighborhoods) is a feast for the eyes. For the price of a *café amb llet* (white coffee) you can people watch in the beautiful and historic *Borne* neighborhood, whilst a stroll along swanky *Paseo de Gracia* will regale your eyes with endless magnificent architectural facades, including those of Gaudi's *Casa Batlló* and *Casa Milà*. As for spots from where to take in the unmistakable Barcelona skyline, you can't go wrong with the summit of Montjuic Hill - just use your provided metro pass and take the funicular railway from Parallel metro stop. Watching the sun set from beside the castle is recommended!

Whether you're looking to save money, or just enrich your study abroad experience, make sure that you take advantage of your unlimited use of local public transport to explore wider Barcelona. There are plenty of gems that aren't on the radar of most tourists, for example the incredible *Parc del Labarint* (Labyrinth Park) the northern suburb of *Horta*. You should also try and spend an afternoon in a typical Catalan neighborhood such as Sants – it's lively and endearing but you won't find many tourists there, which is precisely why it's such a cool cultural experience to go.

Finally, it's worth noting that there tend to be a tremendous number of publicly funded events in Barcelona, often involving music, dance, art or food. More often than not, these are free! For a taste of what's programmed for the coming months, check out the following website. <https://guia.barcelona.cat/en/agenda>.

Your local AIFS team will provide you with more information on affordable opportunities at orientation and throughout the program.

**Veterans:** We strongly advise students who receive counselling in the US for PTSD to discuss a mental health plan with their home doctor. Also, let your AIFS team know if you have any concerns or need anything while abroad.

Compulsory military service was abolished in Spain in 2001, when the Spanish Army became a fully professionalized volunteer force. A military parade takes place in Madrid on *Día Nacional*, October 12.

**Women Abroad:** Spain is considered safe, however, women should follow ‘common sense’ safety precautions as they would in the United States, remain vigilant of their surroundings and make a conscious effort to travel in groups as often as possible. Gender equality is entrenched in the law and discrimination is illegal, as is any kind of violence against women. This doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen, but serious assaults aren’t common. Some women experience unwanted attention including whistles, comments or sounds made when walking past. Please notify AIFS staff immediately of any incidents that make you uncomfortable or if you should happen to feel unsafe at all.

**If you discover any additional resources while in Barcelona, please share with your AIFS Team.**



## HOUSING AND MEALS

---

Students live in a single room in a homestay or a shared room in an apartment.

### Homestay

Living with a homestay family is the best way to immerse yourself in the language and culture of Spain and many students choosing this option find that it is the most rewarding part of their time abroad. It is the best way to learn Spanish, get a unique insight into the culture and integrate into the local community. Each family is unique; you may live with a retired couple whose children have left home, a divorced or widowed woman with children still living at home, a married couple with children or a family with some older children still living at home. Students will have their own room.

### Spanish homes and the Standard of Living

Host families live in apartments in the center of the city. Think small and modest compared to American standards. The typical American house surrounded by a green lawn does not exist within city limits. The homes are comfortable by local standards, but not luxurious. A mature outlook and flexible attitude are prerequisites for homestay students, who enjoy a less institutionalized atmosphere, home cooked meals and an opportunity to practice and improve their Spanish as well as be immersed in Spanish culture.

Spaniards have fewer “things” than Americans. For example, you may only see one TV and telephone in the home. Spaniards socialize outside their homes – they don’t have guests over often, especially for parties or to watch movies. Friends, young and old, meet in local cafes and tapas bars.

In the homestay, there will be one main living/dining room where the family does most of their “living” – eating meals, watching TV, etc. Spaniards don’t spend much time aside from sleeping and studying in their bedrooms, which tend to be small compared to American standards – just big enough for a bed and a desk. Closet space is limited. A small wardrobe with a few drawers is all you will probably have. Spaniards have smaller wardrobes than Americans,



with just a few of the basics. Students are expected to wear slippers or flip-flops in the home, not to go barefoot.

### Points to Remember in a Homestay

- Remember that living in someone else's home is an adjustment for them as well as for you. Be aware of the daily routine in the household and adapt to it. Be as patient, flexible and cooperative as possible.
- Be prepared to try foods that you have not had before but be honest (and polite) if you do not like something. If there are certain foods, you do not like or cannot eat let your host know from the start. If you aren't honest about your likes/dislikes, you run the risk of being served something that you dislike for your entire stay. The best policy is to be open, honest and polite.
- Be considerate. If you come home late at night, be quiet. You do not have a curfew but please do not disturb your host's sleep.
- Speak to your host family about meal times so you know when to be back. If you're going to be late or cannot make dinner then make sure to tell them in advance, so no food goes to waste.
- Take short showers. You will most likely be sharing the bathroom with other members of the household so don't monopolize it at key times of the day.
- Don't invite anyone over without first asking permission from your hosts.
- Don't help yourself to food or drinks unless you are invited to do so. Ask permission to use the refrigerator. Students are not permitted to make meals for themselves.
- Don't lose track of your house key. If you lose your key you will be responsible for paying to have the locks changed.
- Don't return to the U.S. and leave your host with an enormous electricity bill. Turn the lights off when you leave a room, take short showers (see above), and don't expect air conditioning or fans. Be considerate and conserve energy.

### Apartments

Students can opt to live in a fully furnished apartment in a well communicated neighborhood of Barcelona. Apartment living is ideal for students who like their independence, want to cook for themselves and to

experience city life. Apartments are generally shared with 3-6 other AIFS students in a single room with access to a communal kitchen, living area and bathroom.

### Housing Guidelines

Please follow these guidelines in all the types of accommodation:

- Respect your host, roommates and neighbors
- Don't monopolize shared facilities
- Keep the noise down and no noise after 10 p.m.
- Keep your music down to a minimum at all times
- Don't leave valuables lying around
- Keep your living quarters clean and tidy
- Don't lose your key. If you lose it, you will have to pay to replace the locks.
- Abide by the rules and regulations of the host or apartment agency
- Ask permission of hosts or sharers when you want to invite guests
- No visitors after 10pm and no sleep-over guests are allowed
- Be patient, flexible and cooperative as possible.
- Be prepared to try foods that you have not had before

Students who have overnight visitors may be expelled from their accommodation without a refund.

### Laundry

**Homestay students** have one load of laundry per student per week included. Students must pay extra to their families for extra laundry, or they may take their clothes to the local laundromat.

**Apartment students** - laundry facilities are available.

### Electricity

American appliances run on 110 volts and most of Europe uses 220 volts. You can buy transformers to convert the electricity and adapter kits for the different sockets at your local hardware store before you leave. However, we suggest that you do not bring items such as hairdryers, curling irons, hair straighteners, electrical razors etc. The electrical current abroad is so great that if you try to use

them, even with an adapter/converter, they may explode, short out, melt or cause a fire. Adapters are really made for occasional, not daily use so you are better off just buying these items abroad. Remember you always have the option to share these purchases with your roommate(s).

Generally, most tech items such as laptop/tablet, cell phones, and cameras come with dual voltage converter built in. You should be able to use these items with a plug adapter. Always be sure to check with the manufacturer before using items abroad.

### **Damages**

All students will be billed for any damages or other charges incurred during the program.

### **Food in Spain**

Spanish cuisine is known internationally as the Mediterranean diet and it is based on legumes (beans), fish, pork and vegetables. Tortillas in Spain are not made of corn or flour but are really a potato omelet. Host families will not serve Mexican dishes such as guacamole, tacos and enchiladas.



The Spaniards eat a lot of tasty fried food that is generally prepared with olive oil (an important part of the healthy Mediterranean diet). There is a predominance of fish, salads, pasta, chicken, pork and eggs. Typical authentic dishes include: “paella” (saffron flavored rice with seafood), “gazpacho” (cold vegetarian soup) and “tortilla” (potato omelet). Whether it is beer, wine or Spain’s

colorful Sangria, alcohol often finds its place on most tables in households at meal time.

Meals require an almost complete readjustment of eating habits, especially the times of the meals. Breakfast in Spain is continental, in the strictest sense of the word. It consists of coffee or tea with a type of biscuit or bread. At about 2:30 p.m., the main meal (“comida”), consisting of two courses plus dessert, is served. A lighter meal (“cena”) is served at around 9:30 p.m. Spanish cuisine is tasty and varied. Dessert almost always consists of seasonal fresh fruit or cheese.

### **AIFS Meal Plan**

The homestay option includes two meals, breakfast and dinner, every day with your host. Lunch and food or drinks between meals must be bought by the student outside the home. Meal times are rigid and cannot be changed to suit the student.

Apartment students do not receive a meal plan. The estimated cost of some food and drinks is shown in the local prices list in the Money Matters section of this handbook.

Students with special dietary requirements should notify their Program Manager upon application. AIFS will try to accommodate dietary needs but cannot guarantee that they will be met. Access to specialized food (for example, halal or kosher food, vegetarian or vegan meals etc.) will vary according to the local culture.



## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

---

As part of your program, you will receive an unlimited public transport pass for Barcelona (Zone 1). You will only receive pass card, so in the case of loss, you would be responsible for replacing it. You'll use your pass every day so please look after it!

Barcelona public transportation is clean, fast, safe and efficient. It can be daunting to understand – at first - but you'll soon get the hang of it. The public transport map looks like a giant spider's web as Barcelona has one of the most extensive networks in Europe. It includes 11 metro lines, a citywide tram and bus system, plus 17 lines of *Cercanias* (local trains that link downtown Barcelona with the suburbs, and even towns well outside the city).

### Metro

The Metro network is very easy to use. Each metro line has a color and a number. It runs from 5:00 am to midnight (Sunday to Thursday). On Friday night hours are extended until 2:00am and on Saturday the service runs all night long and into Sunday! The frequency of trains varies according to the time of the day and the day of the week (roughly every 3 minutes during busy times and 7 minutes during the rest of the day. At night, trains run every 15 minutes). The metro is normally very safe, however, some pickpockets operate in touristic stations, like in many big cities.

[Click Here for Barcelona Metro Map](#)



### Buses and Trams

Generally speaking, students tend to use the metro more than the bus because it's easier to plan one's route and jump from one metro line to another. However, your travelcard is valid for city buses (TMB – *Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona*) and you may find that there is a bus route which is perfect for getting you downtown, or to the study center. As with city trams, which are fun to try out, bus travel requires that you validate your trip by scanning your card each time you jump aboard. Possibly the most useful buses in town are those known as *NitBus*. As the name suggests, *NitBus* run through the night seven days a week and head off in all directions from *Plaça Catalunya*. Spend some time to familiarize yourself with Barcelona's public transport system and you really can get to anywhere on your provided pass.

### Regional Trains

The Regional Trains are either called *Cercanias* (Spanish) or *Rodalies* (Catalan) but don't be confused – they are the same thing! These trains can be handy for crossing the city in a couple of stops and you can do this for free using your travelcard (Zone one only). However, more usually you'd use these trains if you wanted to visit local towns or beaches near to Barcelona (just buy a return ticket at a station machine). The pretty village of *Sant Pol de Mar* is great for a beach day, whilst the impressive *Sitges* and *Castelldefels* are easy to reach heading south on the coastal R2 train.

[Click here for Barcelona TMB Bus Map](#)

[Click here for Barcelona NitBus Map](#)



## COMMUNICATIONS ABROAD

---

Keeping in touch with friends and family back home is very important and luckily it is easier than ever.

### Mail

You can receive mail at:

*Your name*

*Your accommodation address, including ZIP code.*

Mail must be addressed to the student and not the AIFS Team or host family.

Mailboxes are marked with yellow and red stripes in Spain. Be sure to deposit mail in the boxes marked “extranjero” or “avion”—this is outgoing mail.

Please remember that regular mail to or from the U.S. can take a long while to reach its destination. Letters and packages may arrive after you have left the program. AIFS and the AIFS Team are not responsible for returning any mail and packages.

Due to customs regulations, you are likely to have to pay a customs tax if you are sent a parcel while abroad. Once students are on campus they are surprised to discover the paperwork, faxes, phone calls and cost necessary to clear the packages sent to them and the delay entailed. It is a bureaucratic and time-consuming process to have packages released from customs. Many documents including original invoices for the items shipped may be required by customs. **We cannot stress this advice enough.** Unfortunately, AIFS staff cannot do anything to help you with these procedures and cannot predict the cost of the custom fees.

If people from home want to send you a care package they must declare the contents as “used goods for personal use only”. They cannot send something new and declare it as used goods as customs often open packages to check the contents. Please try to deter people at home from sending you packages incorrectly labeled as used goods as they will be held up at customs, require time-consuming paperwork to get released and are often heavily taxed and therefore costly to recover. We cannot stress this advice enough.

If you must send or receive important items, FedEx or UPS should be used as they are safer and quicker and can be tracked. Please do not ask anyone to send prescription

drugs, vitamins, contact lenses, cosmetics, electrical goods and food or anything that could be mistaken for these items. Due to customs restrictions, these items cannot be shipped overseas.

In general, please ask people to NOT send you parcels -- especially near the end of the program.

### Making and Receiving Phone Calls

To call abroad you require the country code and the area code of where you are calling and the exit code of where you are calling from. Instructions on calling the U.S. will be covered during orientation at the start of the program.

The exit code for an international line from the U.S. is 011

The exit code from Spain is 00

The country code for the U.S. is 1

The country code for Spain is 34

- To call a phone in Spain from the U.S. dial: 011 +34 +number
- To call the U.S. from Spain dial: 00 (exit code) +1 (country code) + area code + number

In general, phone calls are much more expensive than in the U.S. We strongly recommend that you use a local pre-paid phone card whenever possible for your calls. We do not recommend that you purchase phone cards in the U.S. for use in Europe. In the past students who have done so have found either the phone cards do not work, or the minutes promised are for long-distance calls within the U.S. and that a call from Europe to the U.S. will consume the card allowance in significantly less time.

### Cell Phones

If you are planning on bringing your Smartphone, please remember these points:

- Make sure it is insured
- Contact your U.S. cell service provider before departure to check that you can use it abroad
- Check the prices for calls, texts and data
- Decide if you want a data roaming package
- Know how to turn off data roaming on your phone to use it with free Wi-Fi when available



Some students purchase a cheap cell phone once they are abroad. Most work on a pay-as-you-go basis with pre-paid minutes and this may be the cheapest way to make local calls while abroad. The AIFS Team will be able to advise you.

Another choice is to purchase a SIM card abroad to use in a U.S. cell phone, provided that your phone is unlocked and compatible. Check with your cell service provider before you leave. The main providers of SIM cards often have offers for monthly DATA plans.

Please note that any deals will apply to calls made and received within Spain. If you travel during weekends, you should make sure you switch it off as making and receiving calls from the U.S. will be expensive.

### Internet and Computers

The internet is the main way students keep in contact with friends, family and staff by using Email, Social Media, and apps such as Whatsapp, FaceTime, Teams and Zoom. We advise using Wi-Fi based services for the majority of your communication.

Many places will have wireless internet access free of charge but remember it can be slower and less reliable than in the U.S. and any illegal streaming and downloading will not be tolerated.

We advise students to bring a laptop, tablet or Smartphone as they will be useful for studying as well as good for communicating with staff, other students and family back home. It is important to note that you are responsible for your own laptop and its safekeeping. For this reason, it is always a good idea to check the program insurance policy regarding the personal effects coverage and the related limits to make sure you have enough coverage for any personal property such as laptops.

Access to the internet is available for free in AIFS accommodations. There is also Wireless access in the AIFS Study Center and in numerous hot spots on campus and cafes around city.

### Free Ways to Keep in Touch

There are lots of free ways of connecting with friends and family and many free apps available that allow you to message, call or video call friends and family back home

and friends and staff on campus. Some examples are Skype, Facetime, and WhatsApp. Just be sure to research options before you go abroad. **We advise that you download WhatsApp and any other app you plan to use before you leave the U.S. so they are ready to use when you arrive.** All require an internet connection, and the quality of the connection can vary greatly depending on signal strength.

Don't forget the time difference between the U.S. and where you are studying and please be considerate to hosts and roommates.



## MONEY MATTERS

---

During your study abroad experience, it is an unavoidable fact that you will need access to funds. The cost of the AIFS program is fairly comprehensive. However, in order to ensure that you budget your personal spending money correctly, it is vital that you understand precisely what is covered in the program cost and what your own responsibility is. Check this before you depart!

There are a number of excursions offered by AIFS and certainly enough to do in Barcelona to keep you occupied the whole time here, but some students do want to travel to other parts of Europe and for this you will need more money.

**Please note** - you should notify your bank before you leave the U.S. so they know you will be withdrawing foreign currencies and that you are planning to use your bank card abroad.

### Currency

Many countries in Europe including Spain use the Euro as their form of currency. Students should check the current exchange rates before they depart on the AIFS program.

You can check here for current exchange rates: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) You should pay attention to exchange rates while you are abroad as some will change day to day.

Before you leave, we recommend that you check to see if your bank has a relationship with any banks abroad which might save you some money in withdrawal fees. You should find out what transaction fees your bank will charge in the U.S. These vary depending on your bank and can be an unwelcome surprise.

It's worth taking time to familiarize yourself with the currency before arrival, checking out the new coins and banknotes. It is a good idea to have some currency with you upon your arrival. You do not want to go out searching for a bank immediately. Don't carry around large sums of cash because if it is lost or stolen there is no way to replace it and it is not covered by insurance.

Don't take lots of dollars with you as many places will not change them or may charge high commission rates. If family and friends give you money, put it into your bank account and access it through the ATM when you need it.

## Local Prices

### FOOD/DRINKS

Coffee.....	1.50€
Roll .....	2.50€
Sandwich and a drink .....	4.50 €
Main course in modest restaurant .....	10 €
Mineral water .....	1 €
Coca Cola.....	1.50 €
Pastry/cake .....	2.50 €

### CLOTHING

Generic jeans .....	25 €
Pair of shoes.....	30 €

### MISCELLANEOUS

Haircut (men) .....	18€
Haircut (women).....	25 €
Movie ticket.....	3.70-6.50€
Used bike.....	40€
New bike.....	120€
Batteries.....	2.30 €
Local transportation pass.....	100€
Laundry.....	6€
Basic cooking utensils.....	15-30 €
Postcard/letter to U.S. (postage) .....	1,35€€

### TOILETRIES

Toothpaste.....	2.60€
Shampoo.....	4.00€
Gillette Blue II Plus.....	5.50€
Shaving Foam (200ml) .....	4.00 €
Body Lotion (250mls) .....	3.50 €
2-in-1 Shampoo/Conditioner (200m) .....	3 €
Tampax (12) .....	4€
Shower Wash (250ml).....	3.50€

### ACADEMIC

Class materials.....	5€
Text books.....	25€
Dictionary.....	8€



## ATM cards

In almost all cases your U.S. debit cards can access money from the ATMs of most banks abroad but remember that you need a PIN to use the card. If you fail to have this number for your card, you won't be able to use it. Make sure you contact your bank prior to departure to get your four-digit PIN. Also without warning they may fail to work so they should not be relied on as the sole means of acquiring money. Students should contact their banks about withdrawing foreign currencies from their U.S. accounts. If you make an ATM withdrawal overseas it is a good idea to check your statement online and see exactly how much it is costing you in U.S. dollars. Your AIFS team will be able to provide you with reputable convenient ATM locations.

## Credit cards

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. Make sure the card has a chip and not just a magnetic strip on the back. The most recognized cards are Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Visa is the most widely accepted. You can take a cash advance from your credit cards if you have a PIN, but in general, they should be used only in an emergency, as interest rates are very high. You can get the PIN by contacting your credit card company.

Please keep in mind that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially U.S. style cards where you have to sign for your purchase. Always check if a business accepts your credit card before making a purchase. Many places have a minimum spend if paying by card. Please also have some photo ID as you may be asked for it at the time of payment.



## Banking

It is very important that you contact your bank before you travel to Spain and inform them when and where you will be overseas, otherwise they may block your account when they see purchases abroad and getting them unblocked can be frustrating and will take time.

You will only be able to access money from your checking account so please make sure that you transfer funds into this account.

Please keep your cards extra safe whilst abroad. 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.

If your bank account has an online banking capability, it's a good idea to sign up for that service, so that you can see any transaction fees your bank is charging, the rate of exchange and generally manage your money more effectively.

You will not be able to open bank accounts during your stay abroad.

Regular banking business hours in Spain are 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday to Friday. Banks are closed on Saturday and Sunday.

## Pre-paid Travel Cards

A very good back up to a regular bank account are pre-paid cards, e.g. [usa.visa.com](https://usa.visa.com), [Cash Passport](#), or [FairFX](#). They are available in the U.S before departure and can be pre-loaded and re-loaded at any time. They work in the same way as regular debit cards by using a PIN for withdrawals and transactions. They are a secure way of using money overseas and in the event that the pre-paid card is lost or stolen it can be replaced quickly. These have replaced paper travelers' checks which are no longer commonly used.



## Personal checks

You will not be able to cash personal checks.

## Wiring money

The fastest way to get money transferred to you while you are abroad is through [Money Gram](#) or [Western Union-Money in Minutes](#). This can be done at any Western Union or Money Gram office or online with a credit or debit card. Please bear in mind that it is expensive to send money this way, so it should only really be used in emergency situations. However, there is no charge to receive funds; all you need is some ID and the reference number (given to the sender of the money) to pick up the money anywhere in the world.

## Tipping

You will find that there are very different cultural differences to tipping. In Europe, for example most people employed in the service industry are paid a reasonable wage, therefore, Europeans only tip if they have received a good service. Other places in the world will have their own expectations and customs about tipping. This will be discussed during your program orientation when you arrive.



## HEALTH AND SAFETY WHILE ABROAD

While a study abroad experience is usually an extremely safe one, it is important to remember basic safety precautions that anyone should take when in an unfamiliar environment.

### Safety Guidelines

AIFS provides detailed security briefings to students on arrival. These measures should be followed at all times:

- Sign up for The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) before you depart. 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. It will allow you to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate: <https://step.state.gov/step/>
- In February 2020, the U.S. Embassy in Spain issued a security alert warning of an increase in sexual assault against young U.S. citizen visitors and students in Spain. Read the alert here: <https://es.usembassy.gov/security-alert-u-s-mission-spain-february-3-2020>  
Always check for the latest security alerts for any country you are studying in or plan to visit.
- Login to [www.mycisi.com](http://www.mycisi.com) Cultural Insurance Services International. It provides information about your insurance plan and helps with any security and medical issues.
- Download the CISI mobile app at: [www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp)  
You can access your travel insurance documents, view country-specific travel alerts, personal security assistance information, search medical providers worldwide and much more. In the event of an emergency check-in using the app so we know you are safe or if you need assistance.
- In case of medical or security related emergency please contact our 24/7 emergency assistance provider, On Call International. The details can be found on page 2.
- Leave a copy of your itinerary, passport and this handbook with someone at home. Make sure they have your new cell number if you change it while abroad.
- Keep personal identification with you at all times with the address and telephone number of your school, the AIFS office, the On Call International details and the International Emergency Number. Store these numbers



in your phone and memorize the address of your accommodation.

- Carry a photocopy of your passport and take special care to keep the original in a safe place.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so responsibly. Mature and sensible behavior should prevail in all circumstances. Alcohol can impair your judgment—you cannot be alert if you have been drinking. Never leave your drink unattended – if you feel someone may have tampered with your drink, do not drink it.
- Be careful with your personal belongings, particularly in bars and cafes, street markets, and train or bus stations. Never hang your backpack or purse on the back of a chair in public places; keep it in your lap or on the floor between your feet. Don't carry large sums of cash.
- Be cautious when meeting new people. Don't give out your address, number, AIFS address or school address to people you meet. If you want to give out contact information, give them your cell number only once you know them very well.
- Know where the nearest police station and hospital are and keep emergency numbers handy.
- Avoid any disturbances and demonstrations and avoid discussing politics in public.
- Recognize and avoid high risk areas. The AIFS Team will advise you about any.
- Be vigilant. Report suspicious activity or unknown individuals “hanging around” in your building. Be careful of who has access to your home. Visitors should be screened and are not allowed to stay overnight, even family members from the U.S.
- Never accept a package/bag from someone you do not know well and never agree to watch someone else's belongings in stations, airports, or other public places.
- Look out for each other! Use the buddy system and make sure you don't leave your friends alone in situations that may be unsafe, particularly at night.
- If you go out on your own let someone know where you are going and when you are likely to be back.
- Avoid travelling late at night. If you can't, sit near the driver or conductor. Avoid empty compartments and upstairs on buses.
- Check the taxi is the one you booked. Do not use unlicensed taxis.
- Stay away from drugs. Little can be done to help you if

you are caught with illegal drugs. It is your responsibility to know the drug laws of the countries you plan to visit. “I didn't know” will not get you out of jail.

- If you go anywhere overnight, let the AIFS Team, your homestay parents, your roommate, etc. know where you are going and when you expect to return. Leave a number where you can be reached if possible.
- We strongly advise that you travel on AIFS excursions. These are arranged with providers that we are confident meet the required standards of safety and reliability and you will be accompanied by AIFS staff or representatives. If you do choose to travel independently, it is your responsibility to review and evaluate any tour company, transportation provider and any accommodation you choose to use. AIFS does not endorse any tour operators or travel service providers.
- Observe your accommodation rules. They are designed to protect the security of all residents.
- In the event of any emergency, including terrorist activity, contact your AIFS AIFS Team to let them know your whereabouts and for advice on how to proceed. You should also contact any friends or family who may be concerned to reassure them of your safety. If necessary, you can also contact the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy for urgent advice.
- If your property is lost or stolen, contact the appropriate local authorities and file a claim with CISI Insurance. Please review the CISI Insurance policy regarding personal property loss, including the deductible and maximum allowable financial coverage.

**In the event of any serious incident or if you need support in any situation, please contact your AIFS local team immediately so that they can assist you. The emergency contact details are shown on page 2 of this handbook.**

### Medical Insurance Coverage

All students have AIFS medical insurance which provides extensive coverage. This includes 24-hour emergency telephone assistance service. Multilingual help and advice will be provided in the event of any emergency.

If you require medical attention while abroad the AIFS staff may refer you to a local physician and accompany you if you'd like. They will also provide you with the necessary

insurance forms and help you with filing claims. Please note that you will be expected to pay up front for all medical expenses and to file an insurance claim for reimbursement. Save any doctors' bills if you seek treatment.

Always remember to inform the staff first about your sickness and to collect the insurance form from the office.

The AIFS medical insurance plan covers medical bills up to a maximum of \$250,000 for each medically covered illness or accident abroad. For details see the AIFS Group Insurance Plan brochure. It is available online through your AIFS portal: [www.aifsabroad.com/login](http://www.aifsabroad.com/login)

### **Websites Dealing with Security Issues**

U.S. Department of State website with up-to-the-minute information about security: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

U.S. Department of State website specifically for students abroad: [travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html)

The free service Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) for U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad allowing them to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate: [step.state.gov/step/](http://step.state.gov/step/)

Details of U.S. Embassies, Consulates and Diplomatic Missions and their emergency services:  
[www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov)



## **STUDENT CONDUCT**

---

As part of the application process, all students sign an Agreement and Release form in which they agree to abide by the rules of the program as well as a Code of Conduct which outlines the expected standards of behavior. Rules and regulations will be reviewed at orientation. If these rules are not followed the student will be asked to leave the program without the possibility of refund.

### **Alcohol and Drugs**

Excessive consumption of alcohol and use of illegal drugs is forbidden and will result in immediate dismissal from the program without rebate. Students must obey the laws of the host country.

### **Probation and Dismissal**

Students who fail to maintain standards of conduct and academic achievement may be removed from AIFS accommodation or be dismissed without rebate. A note to this effect will be placed on the student's permanent record. Students dismissed because of academic or disciplinary standing forfeit all academic credit. A professor may fail a student because of excessive unexcused absences, as well as by examination or other evaluation. In cases of misconduct, a student may be warned, placed on non-academic probation, academically withdrawn or dismissed from the program as the circumstances warrant. The decision of the Director of the AIFS College Division is final.

### **Rude, Aggressive and Offensive Behavior**

AIFS will not tolerate rude, aggressive or offensive behavior, or verbal abuse towards AIFS staff, host families or academic staff. Students who do not maintain acceptable standards of behavior may be removed from AIFS accommodations or removed from the program without rebate. AIFS has the complete discretion to communicate with a student's home college or university regarding any issue at any time.

## CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION

---

It's no exaggeration to say that Barcelona is among the world's premier visitor destinations. Few cities on earth combine the aesthetics, culture, history, cuisine, art, architecture, and razzmatazz of daily life in quite such a complete way. Yes, you have city beaches where you can enjoy the feeling of the Mediterranean lapping around your toes. However, it would be a crime to spend all your time between the classroom and the beach because the cultural heritage of the city is so incredibly rich.

With the benefit of an extended stay in the Catalan capital, you've got the opportunity to immerse yourself in local culture in a way which will be seriously profound and enriching. Challenge yourself to get out there and explore and you will be rewarded by a city which has so many layers to its character.

It's a key ambition of ours to help every student discover Barcelona (and beyond!) to the full. Regular day trips and excursions are a core element of our programing, as is the Cultural Calendar of weekly activities included in your program fee. Heading the activities that we organize will be "must do" visits (such as the *Sagrada Familia*, for example) but we'll also bring you to lesser-known beauty spots and places off the beaten path. Our local AIFS staff are filled with enthusiasm to take you to the coolest and most authentic places that we know, and we promise you'll have a blast discovering them with us.

Here's a selection of typical activities, tours and visits:

- Guided City Tour + Montjuic and Parc Güell.
- Sagrada Familia Tour
- Tapas Tour and Flamenco Show
- Picasso Museum
- Spanish Cooking Class
- Game at *Camp Nou* (home ground of *FC Barcelona*)
- Day trip to Girona/ Montserrat/ Tarragona

- Local Festivals – eg *La Merce* (Sep) *San Joan* (June)
- Port Cable Car and Magic Fountain Lightshow
- Cava Vineyard Tour and Salvador Dali Museum
- Sunset Catamaran Tour
- Farewell Dinner

*Please note that students may be asked to pay a small additional fee for some of the activities shown here.*

### Volunteer Opportunities

If you are willing to make a serious commitment, volunteer work can be arranged through an NGO to provide services to people in need within the local community.

It is an excellent way to have a unique and powerful life experience in a foreign country.





# PACKING LIST

Remember:

- Have a sturdy label on your luggage and attach something to your case to identify it easily.
- Pack lightly and check the local climate
- Check the baggage restrictions for each airline you will be flying with
- Do not bring valuable/expensive items
- Machine washable clothes are best
- Most toiletries can be purchased abroad
- Pack a few clothes and toiletries in your carry-on bag to get you through the first night in case your checked baggage gets delayed.



Clothing		Toiletries		Extras	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Underwear	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toothbrush/toothpaste	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laptop/tablet
<input type="checkbox"/>	Socks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deodorant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical Adapter
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undershirt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sanitary products	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earphone/Headphones
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long sleeve shirt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact lens solution	<input type="checkbox"/>	USB cable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Short sleeve shirts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra prescription glasses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Charger
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweatshirt or Sweater	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brush/Comb	<input type="checkbox"/>	Backpack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jeans/Khakis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shaving Razor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Alarm clock
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shorts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nail Clippers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital camera
<input type="checkbox"/>	Belt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Makeup	<input type="checkbox"/>	Money belt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Skirts/Dresses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prescribed medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dictionary/language app
<input type="checkbox"/>	Workout clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over the counter medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Umbrella
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pajamas	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunscreen	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sun hat
<input type="checkbox"/>	Light Jacket	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nice outfit with smart shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandals/Sneakers	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimsuit	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beach towel/ bath towels	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shower shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	