

AIFS CUSTOMIZED, FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS IN
FLORENCE
PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK, SPRING SEMESTER 2020

Florence, Italy

WELCOME!

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

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

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

AIFS Office in the U.S American Institute for Foreign Study

Customized, Faculty-led Programs

1 High Ridge Park

Stamford, CT 06905

Tel: (800) 727-2437 Fax (203) 399-5597 E-mail:

customizedfacultyled@aifs.com

The AIFS Office in the U.S is your main point of contact and coordinates all pre-departure program aspects.

AIFS Florence Study Center

Piazza dei Peruzzi 1

Florence 50125, Italy

Tel: (+39) 055 2399 236

Emergency: (+39) 340 836 5089

Email: florence@aifs.co.uk

The AIFS Office in Florence works together with your faculty to coordinate the academic aspects of your program, and handles all other aspects of the program including housing, social/cultural activities, and excursions.

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BEFORE YOU GO!

To do list:

- Please read all the information and documents on your online student portal:
www.aifsabroad.com/customized/Apply for or renew your passport if necessary
- Check your visa status (see page 3)
- See your physician and complete the Medical Exam Form (see page 4)
- Visit the U.S. Department of State's website for students going abroad:
<http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>
- Sign up for The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). It is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens/nationals who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country:
<https://step.state.gov/step/>
- Download the CISI mobile app at:
www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp

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, please 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 number in Florence

340 836 5089 (if calling from Italy)
011 39 340 836 5089 (if calling from the U.S.)

Medical or security related emergency

In case of medical or security related emergency, students should call AXA Assistance on:

(855) 327-1411 (calling toll-free from within the US)
(312) 935-1703 (calling from outside of the US, collect calls accepted)

Please quote: Policy **GLM N04983117**

Medical assistance (24-hour) can be found at:

- Misericordia, Piazza del Duomo, 20
tel. 055 21 22 22
- Medical Service Firenze, Via Roma, 4 tel. 055 47 54 11
- 24-hour pharmacies for emergency medical needs are: S.M. Novella Train Station (main train station)

Always remember to inform AIFS staff first about your sickness, keep all receipts and fill out the insurance claim form from the office after going to the doctor.

Emergency numbers in Italy

Police	113
Medical Emergency	118
Fire	115

U.S. Embassy

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

www.usembassy.gov

- Complete the Medical Exam Form on your portal (see the Medical section)
- Order enough medication to last the entire stay abroad
- Consult your airline's baggage allowance guidelines

- Start planning what to pack
- Buy a useful 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 phone abroad (see the Communications Abroad section)
- Give the 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

AIFS Office in the U.S.

American Institute For Foreign Study
Customized, Faculty-led Programs
1 High Ridge Park
Stamford, CT 06905
Tel: (800) 727-2437
Fax: (203) 399-5597
E-mail: customizedfaculty@aifs.com

The AIFS Office in the US 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

Please apply for your passport as soon as possible to avoid having to pay extra fees for expedited service. Average processing times are 4-6 weeks. To check on the status of a passport application, please call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778.

Visas

Students traveling with a U.S passport are not required to apply for a visa to Italy in order to participate in the program. Should you wish to extend your stay in Italy or abroad before/after the program, there are restrictions and regulations regarding European travel and the Schengen Agreement.

The rule is: If you wish to stay in Italy or any of the Schengen countries for longer than 90 days (the duration of the program), you will need a Visa. Please note:

Visas will not be issued solely for tourism purposes.

You cannot get a Visa when you are already in Italy, it can only be obtained in the USA prior to departure.

Nobody is guaranteed a Visa and processing times can be long.

If you are granted a Visa, you will need to apply for a Permit to Stay once in Italy, costs are approximately €150

If you want to submit a Visa application, we advise applying to your local Italian consulate at least 8 weeks prior to the program start date.

To discover what Visa option(s) you have (if any), please speak to your local Italian consulate. AIFS provides this information as a general guide; we cannot answer any specific questions about Visas. Decisions about who can and cannot get a Visa are made on a case by case basis by consulate officers and AIFS is not allowed to interfere in any way. If you need to contact the Italy based AIFS staff, our email is: florence@aifs.co.uk

Please be aware that when you depart the U.S., if your return flight date is beyond 90 days and you do not have a visa, you may be denied boarding.

For more detailed information on International Travel, please visit the US Department of State's website at:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Useful websites

www.italiantourism.com
www.theflorentine.net
www.trenitalia.com

WHAT TO BRING

Bring as little as you possibly can. Try not to bring more than one suitcase and one weekend bag. If you bring heavy luggage you will regret it. For the first few days, you will have to carry everything you pack through airports, on buses, up flights of stairs, etc. **Do not pack more than you can easily 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. Certain courses may need you to bring business clothes

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 this handbook, checking your airline's baggage allowance, the local climate and the packing list at the end of this handbook. The weather and climate can be checked here: weather-and-climate.com/

Linens

Linens, blanket and pillows are provided in AIFS accommodation, but you should bring your own towels.

Course Supplies

Depending on which courses you enroll, you might be required to purchase textbooks and/or additional supplies. Please check with your home college instructor for specific information related to your course materials. Notebooks and pens can be easily bought in local stationary stores.

It could be a good idea to bring a good Italian dictionary or download an app to your phone or tablet.

BAGGAGE INFORMATION

Baggage Allowances

International airline carriers expect passengers to adhere to their baggage allowance for transatlantic 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

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 the student web portal: www.aifsabroad.com/login. 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:** While medications used to treat ADHD (Ritalin, Adderall, and Concerta) are no longer illegal in Italy, getting a local doctor abroad to prescribe you the medication is a long and expensive process. If you use one of these medications, you should bring enough with you for the whole semester.
- 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.

ON LOCATION



**Academic Coordinator Abroad
Sophie Monkman**

AIFS Study Center
Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
Florence 50125, Italy

Tel: (39) 055 2399 236
E-mail: smonkman@aifs.co.uk

Sophie works together with your faculty and home college to coordinate all academic aspects of the program.



**Program Coordinator Abroad
Trung Tran**

AIFS Study Center
Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
Florence 50125, Italy

Tel: (39) 055 2399 236
E-mail: ttran@aifs.co.uk

Trung works together with your faculty and home college to coordinate all non-academic aspects of the program.



**Head of Student Services
Gina Baxter**

AIFS Study Center
Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
Florence 50125, Italy

Tel: (39) 055 2399 236
E-mail: gbaxter@aifs.co.uk

Gina manages the team of AIFS Student Advisors who provide assistance and support to all students throughout their time abroad, including housing, medical/emergencies, travel advice and general welfare/wellbeing.



**Student Advisor
Max Zardo**

Born and raised in the Veneto region of Northern Italy, Max Zardo has been working with American students for several years helping them make the most of their time in Italy.



**Student Advisor
Eleonora Fiesoli**

Working with AIFS students since 2018 and Eleonora's favourite thing is getting to know different people and cultures. As a native Italian, she enjoys sharing the Florentine lifestyle with students and professors.

TRAVEL TO FLORENCE

Flight information/tickets

For students selecting the AIFS Group Flight Package, a detailed flight itinerary will be available on your AIFS student portal online once your flight has been booked. Your electronic ticket information and luggage tags 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 Group Flight Package

Return date changes after tickets have been issued may, in some instances, be made through your student portal at www.aifscustomized.com. Changes are subject to airline availability and not guaranteed. There will be a \$350 change fee, plus additional fees/penalties assessed by the airline. Date changes only are permitted. Routing changes are prohibited by the airline. If you have any questions regarding making a return date change please visit the AIFS Florence Student Services office or email us at florence@aifs.co.uk.

Arrival information for students selecting AIFS Group Flight Package

Students who are flying with AIFS will be met at the airport by AIFS staff. For security reasons, AIFS staff is 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 representatives will be waiting for you outside the arrivals area with an AIFS sign.

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 an identification sign. 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 with your new travel itinerary by calling the emergency number +39 340 836 5089 or emailing us at florence@aifs.co.uk.

Once everyone on the group flight has been accounted for, we will transfer you to your hotel (via private bus) and check in to your accommodation the next day.

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 form in the baggage arrival in the airport please give the address of the Study Center, NOT your apartment:

**Your name c/o AIFS
Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
Florence, Italy 50122**

Tel. 055 2399 236

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.

Students traveling independently "Own Travel"

Students making their own flight arrangements must provide complete travel details to AIFS by filling out the Own Travel form on their AIFS Student Portal.

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.

If you are making your own flight arrangements, you will be responsible for making your own way to your accommodation.

After we have received your complete travel itinerary, we will be in touch closer to the departure date with detailed instructions on what to do/where to go on Arrivals Day. If your flight information changes after you submit your Own

Travel form, please notify the AIFS Office in Stamford and the AIFS Office in Florence.

If you are delayed, please contact the AIFS office with your updated travel itinerary by emailing us at florence@aifs.co.uk or phoning the Emergency line at +39 340 836 5089.

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 without these documents. 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.

LIFE IN FLORENCE

Time

Italy is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (New York) and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time (California).

Climate

Italy enjoys mostly mild winters with some months of rainy spells. The summers are also subject to thunderstorms and rain. The hottest months in Florence are June, July and August. From June to August the temperature ranges from a high of 104°F to a low of 80°F. The weather and climate can be checked here: weather-and-climate.com/

Language

The official language is Italian but no previous Italian language study is required.

Orientation

Upon arrival in Italy, students will have an on-site Orientation with in-depth information regarding their program.

Students will receive information about life in Italy, academic matters and social/cultural activities. Students will be able to ask questions about any of their concerns.



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 for the next semester. 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 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, re-aculturating and re-assimilating 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 it 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.



HOUSING AND MEALS

Housing

Students live in self-catering apartments within 30 minutes walking distance from the AIFS Study Center. These apartments are located within the historic center of Florence, in buildings with Italian neighbors, tourists and international students. You will receive detailed information about your housing placement during the orientation and Arrivals Day. It is not common for apartments and homes in Italy to have air-conditioning.

Apartments

Apartments are generally available for 4-6 students to share. They are fully furnished with bedrooms, bathroom, and a kitchen with utensils and in some cases a living room. If you want to share an apartment with just one other student, it will probably be a small studio apartment with kitchen facilities in one room. Each bed comes with a change of linens and pillow/blankets. All apartments have a washing machine or access to one.

It is not common for apartments and homes in Italy to have air-conditioning so you should plan to buy a fan to share with your roommates. Air-conditioning is not included in the price of your utilities, please note that if you decide to use A/C units you will be charged for extra utilities consumption (costs can exceed €300 per month).

Housing Guidelines

Please follow these guidelines in all the types of accommodation:

- Respect your landlord, 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 your landlord and AIFS
- Ask permission of hosts or roommates when you want to invite guests
- No visitors after 10pm and no sleep-over guests are allowed
- Be patient, flexible and cooperative as possible.

Please note that you will be billed for any damage done to your living quarters. If we cannot determine who is responsible for the damages, they will be split equally amongst all roommates.

The AIFS Student Services office is more than willing to help you with a list of inexpensive "hotels" where friends and relatives can stay while visiting you.

Laundry

There are many automatic coin-run Laundromats in Florence that are open until late evening. Prices range from approximately €5-9 for a large load (to wash and dry).

Dry cleaners are also located all over town. All apartments have a washing machine or access to one, clothes dryers are not provided but all are equipped with drying racks. Landlords provide information on building rules and how to use them.

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.

Food

An Italian breakfast generally consists of coffee and “biscotti” (cookies) or “una pasta” (a pastry). Lunch is served from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and consists of a “primo piatto” (first course, soup or pasta) or a “secondo piatto” (second course, usually meat). Some Italians may have a quick “panino” (sandwich) at lunch and make dinner their main meal. Dinner is served around 8 p.m. and includes a first and second course and may be followed by fruit, dessert and coffee.

The Florentines enjoy regional specialties like luscious Pecorino cheese (made from sheep’s milk), “Bistecca alla Fiorentina” (a special cut of beef) and flavorful Chianti wines. Cooking is predominantly simple: dishes rarely have more than a few ingredients, and meat and fish are most often baked or grilled. Typical dishes include fresh pasta: spaghetti, tagliatelle, and wide flat pappardelle; “cinghiale” (wild boar); Mediterranean fish; cheese made from sheep’s milk; and vegetables in season



One of the great joys of a meal in Italy is that most restaurants will not rush you out. Service is relaxed and the bill (“il conto”) will not be brought until you ask for it. Almost all restaurants close one day a week (usually Sunday or Monday).

Typically, a ristorante pays more attention to service and presentation. A “trattoria” is often family style and family run. An “osteria” is a trendier, possibly more expensive eatery. A “tavola calda” offers a sit-down atmosphere with some hot dishes and snack food. A “rosticceria” is equivalent to a take-out deli, with some hot dishes as well.

AIFS Meal Voucher plan

With some programs you may have the option of purchasing the AIFS Meal Vouchers. These vouchers can be used at restaurants in town that participate in the meal voucher program. Each restaurant menu is different, typically your voucher will entitle you to a main course (primo or secondo), a starter (appetizer) and or dessert. Your voucher also always covers the coperto charge and in most cases bottled water.

The estimated cost of some food and drinks is shown in the local prices list in the Money Matters section of this handbook.



Many of the restaurants included in the Meal Voucher program also have vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options.



LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

The main mode of public transportation in Florence is the ATAF bus system. Buses run frequently throughout the city and its suburbs from 6 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. every day. Tickets can be purchased at most “tabacchi” (convenience stores) for €1.50. The ticket is valid for 90 minutes and must be validated as you board the bus.

Santa Maria Novella (SMN) is the main train station in Florence with full access to most main cities in Italy and Europe. Some of the smaller towns can be easily reached by bus, but a good map and a pair of walking shoes is still one of the best modes of transportation. Walking the busy

cobblestone streets allows you to enjoy the art and architecture even more.

COMMUNICATIONS ABROAD

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

Mail

Students can receive mail at:

Your name
c/o AIFS
Piazza dei Peruzzi 1, 50122
Firenze, Italy

Please remember that regular mail to or from the U.S. can take a long while to reach its destination.

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 unreleased from customs. Many documents including original invoices for the items shipped may be required by customs. 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, we advise you not to ask people to send parcels to you especially near the end of the program or if you are on one of our shorter programs.

Making and receiving phone calls

The exit code for the U.S. is 011

The exit code for Italy is 00

The country code for the U.S. is 1

The country code for Italy is 39

The area code for Florence is 055

- To call a Florence land line from the U.S. dial: 011 (exit code) + 39 + 055 + local number
- To call a Florence cell phone number from the U.S. dial: 011 (exit code) + 39 + cell phone number
- To call the U.S. from Italy, direct, 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.

Student apartments do not have telephones.

Cell phones

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

- Make sure it is insured.
- Contact your US 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 that get 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. Staff will be able to advise you.

Another choice is to purchase a SIM card abroad to use in a US 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 so please ask and check with AIFS Staff before making your purchase.

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

Internet and Computers

The internet is the main way students keep in contact with friends, family and staff by using Email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Skype. 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 USA 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 insure your personal effects while abroad.

Local standard Internet connection is provided in apartments and at the AIFS study center. Students may use the wireless connection for free with their own laptops at the AIFS Study Center during office hours.

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, Viber, 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 USA and where you are studying and please be considerate to hosts and roommates.



MONEY MATTERS

During your studying 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 and activities offered by AIFS as part of your Cultural Calendar and certainly enough to do in Florence 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 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. 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 and those that do tend to charge high commission rates. If family and friends give you money as a gift before departing, put it into your bank account and access it through the ATM when you need it.

Local prices

FOOD/DRINKS

Coffee.....	1.00€
Roll	4.00€
Sandwich and a drink.....	5.50€
Main course in modest restaurant.....	10.00€
Mineral water.....	1.50€
Coca Cola	2.50€
Pastry/cake	1.20€

CLOTHING

Generic jeans.....	30.00€
Pair of shoes	70.00€

MISCELLANEOUS

Haircut (men).....	20.00€
Haircut (women)	40.00€
Movie ticket.....	12.00€
Batteries.....	6.00€
Local transportation.....	1.50€
Laundry.....	6.00€
Basic cooking utensils.....	15.00€
Postcard/letter to U.S.A. (postage)	2.30€

TOILETRIES

Toothpaste.....	3.00€
Shampoo.....	4.00€
Gillette Blue II Plus.....	3.50€
Shaving Foam (200ml)	3.00€
Body Lotion (250mls)	18.00€
2-in-1 Shampoo/Conditioner (200m).....	3.20€
Tampax (16)	5.50€
Shower Wash (250ml).....	2.80€

ACADEMIC

See Course Supplies on page 3

ATM cards

In almost all cases your US 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. AIFS Student Advisors 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. The most recognized cards are Visa or Mastercard 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.

Please keep in mind that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially US 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.

Keep in mind that in order to use your credit card you must have a PIN number. You can get this by contacting your credit card company.

Banking

It is very important that you contact your bank 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 some 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.

Pre-paid travel cards

A very good back up to a regular bank account are pre-paid cards, e.g. 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.

Personal checks

Unless you have an American Express card and have made prior arrangements with American Express (Express Cash), 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.

The following Western Union agencies are all located in central Florence:

Via San Gallo, 26
Via della Scala, 13
Via Calzaiuoli, 3
Via de' Cerretani, 74
Corso de' Tintori, 39

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 when they arrive and 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/>
- Login to 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
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 you should make contact as soon as possible with AIFS Staff and family/friends back home to let them know you are ok, you should also check-in using the app so that others will know you are safe or if you need assistance.
- In case of medical or security related emergency please contact AIFS Staff on the 24/7 Emergency telephone who will be able to assist you in reaching out to the appropriate services.
- Leave people at home with a copy of your itinerary and handbook with all the contact and emergency details. Also leave copies of your passport and insurance details. Let them know your new cell number as soon as possible if you change it while abroad.
- Be sure to have personal identification with you at all times with the address and telephone number of the AIFS Study Center, the AIFS Emergency phone number, your CISI insurance card and the International Emergency Number. Please do not carry the address of your accommodation with you, you should memorize it.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport and take special care to keep the original in a safe place.
- Do not advertise the fact that you are American by, for example, wearing your US College sweatshirt/baseball cap and avoid obviously American hangouts.
- Stay in touch regularly with your family. Parents can get worried.
- Drink wisely. Mature and sensible behavior should prevail in all circumstances where alcohol will be served. Drunkenness is not looked upon as funny or tolerable in other countries. Attitudes towards liquor are different in Europe; moderate drinking is a big part of socializing. Alcohol can impair your judgment and lead to serious consequences including expulsion from the program with no refund—please think carefully before making choices.
- Be careful with your personal belongings. Be especially careful 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.
- Try and stay informed on the world situation via newspapers, radio and TV.
- 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.
- Recognize and avoid high risk areas. The Resident Director 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 or suitcase from someone you do not know well. Likewise, do not offer to watch someone else’s belongings in train stations, airports, or other public places.
- Safety in numbers – stick with your friends!
- Avoid travelling late at night. If you can’t, sit near driver or conductor. Avoid empty compartments and upstairs on buses.
- Check the taxi is the one you booked. Do not use unlicensed taxis.
- Avoid discussing politics in public.
- Don’t make jail part of your stay abroad. 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, inform AIFS staff, your roommates, family and friends of where you are going and when you will return. Leave a number where you can be reached if possible.
- Observe your accommodation rules. They are designed to protect the security of all residents.
- In the event of any emergency event, including terrorist activity, please contact AIFS Staff 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 US Consulate or Embassy for urgent advice.
- In the event that any personal property gets lost or stolen, please let AIFS staff know so they can help you to contact the appropriate authorities abroad 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.

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 Florence staff may refer you to a local physician, many of them speak English. 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 \$100,000 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/customized



Websites dealing with security issues

U.S. Department of State website with up-to-the-minute information about security: www.state.gov

U.S. Department of State website specifically for students abroad: 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/

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

The closest American Embassy is located in Rome however, there is an American Consulate located in Florence at:

Lungarno Vespucci, 38.



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.

According to AIFS policy, during the orientation meeting upon arrival, students must sign a Student Conduct contract and a Housing Agreement contract in which AIFS points out the rules of behavior as described below. If these rules are not followed the student may 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.

Standards of Behavior

All students have signed an agreement and release form upon application saying they agree to abide by the program rules and understand that failure to do so may result in them returning home at their own expense with no refund. In addition to this, upon arrival in Italy, students will sign a code of conduct form stating they have read and understood all the program rules and regulations.

AIFS will not tolerate rude, aggressive or offensive behavior, or verbal abuse towards AIFS staff, your faculty, guest lecturers, fellow students, guides or hosts. Students who do not maintain acceptable standards of behavior may be removed from AIFS accommodations or removed from the program without rebate.

Any incident that occurs abroad will be reported by AIFS to the student's faculty and home college. In addition to action taken by AIFS the student's home college may take further disciplinary action back on campus.

The home college and US faculty oversee the academic component of the program which includes academic conduct and achievement. They will liaise with senior staff back at the home campus if there are any issues and implement the appropriate disciplinary action. If a college decides to withdraw or dismiss a student from the program this will be fully supported by AIFS and the student will return home with no refund.



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION

In Florence, artistic, cultural and historic richness is ever present. With the Ponte Vecchio, Pitti Palace, Piazza della Signoria, Accademia and San Marco creating a wonderful backdrop, it is no surprise that walking along the Arno River you come across artists attempting to capture this beautiful city. Take in the sites in and around Florence on visits to museums, art galleries, churches and theaters.

If you are a connoisseur of Italian cuisine, you can learn how to make pasta from scratch or experience a typical trattoria, where you can find some of the best food in Italy. You can also shop in the chic stores of Via de'Tornabuoni or the flea market in Via Pietrapiana (pausing for a delicious gelato or an espresso, of course). Whatever your

tastes, Florence is the perfect spot to acquire a genuine experience of Italian life and culture.



Your AIFS program offers a wide range of optional cultural activities for the students. Examples of activities are:

- Italian cooking classes
- Pizza-making class
- Italian wine tastings
- Concerts/theater (operas and ballets)
- Dinners and events with Italians
- National elite series soccer matches (ACF Fiorentina)
- Museum visits



Day/Weekend trips discovering treasures of Italy may also be included in your program or offered as an optional excursion, visiting places such as:

- Siena & San Gimignano Pisa
- Lucca (approx. €7)
- Cinque Terre (approx. €25)
- Tuscan Farm/Countryside (approx. €35)
- Rome weekend (approx. €310)
- Venice weekend (approx. €320)

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



Sports

Sports facilities are limited. There are a number of tennis courts, which are available for a fee, plus several private gyms and dance studios in town. Gyms or dance classes cost about €100 per month. It is also possible to go canoeing or horseback riding. AIFS Student Services will provide more information. Incidentally, many students find that the walking they do gives them plenty of exercise.

Volunteering



Volunteer work is a great way for students to take an active role in their local

community. AIFS works with a few local organizations to arrange volunteering opportunities throughout the semester for students that are interested in participating. The AIFS Student Services office is happy to provide more information on volunteering while in Florence.

TRAVEL AND EXCURSIONS

Independent travel

If you want to travel outside the program location, we strongly recommend that you participate in the AIFS organized excursions. These are arranged by AIFS with providers that we are confident meet the required standards of safety and reliability and you will be accompanied by AIFS staff or representatives.

We understand that you may want to make independent travel plans, but please note that AIFS does not recommend or endorse third party tour operators or travel service providers, and it is your responsibility to review and evaluate any tour company, transportation provider and hotel/hostel accommodation you choose to use.



ACADEMIC LIFE ABROAD

AIFS Florence Study Center

Located in Piazza dei Peruzzi, a small but historic square that comprised the houses, palaces and loggia of the Peruzzi family and standing adjacent to an ancient Roman amphitheater, the AIFS Study Center is housed in a 13th century Palazzo and only a few minutes' walk from Piazza della Signoria, the Uffizi Gallery, the Duomo, Ponte Vecchio and many of the great Florentine museums/sights. The Study Center is located on the third floor of the Palazzo Peruzzi-Lotti and all classes take place here.

The Study Center is equipped with a student lounge, computers with printing facilities, Wi-Fi, classrooms, a vending/coffee machine, student mailboxes, a small library and the Student Services office where AIFS Student Advisors are on hand to assist students with any questions/concerns they might have.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

When you are abroad please share your experiences. You can do this in various ways:

- Send links, posts, photos or videos directly to AIFS at florence@aifs.co.uk

We are always on the lookout for great photos and videos to use on our website, in our catalogs, and on social media that “capture the culture” and your experience abroad. While you’re abroad or after your return, enter your pictures and videos in the AIFS annual contests for your chance to win prizes worth up to \$500, plus your picture in our catalog!

For more details, go to:

Photo contest: www.aifsabroad.com/alumni/contests.asp

Video contest: <https://www.aifsabroad.com/alumni/video-contests.asp>



- Tag AIFS on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at #aifscustomized, #aifs or #aifsabroad or #aifs_italy



- Blog about your experience on study abroad websites or for AIFS. Send your blogs to florence@aifs.co.uk
- Write a review on study abroad directories such as:
 - www.goabroad.com/reviews/write
 - www.gooverseas.com/leave-a-review
 - www.studyabroad101.com/reviews/new
 - www.studyabroad.com/reviews.aspx

For tips on how to write an objective, useful review read this article:

http://www.aifsabroad.com/alumni/pdf/Objective_Review.pdf

Go to our websites for more information about sharing your experiences:

<http://www.aifsabroad.com/alumni/>

<http://www.aifsabroad.com/alumni/advocate.asp>

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

<input type="checkbox"/>	Underwear
<input type="checkbox"/>	Socks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undershirt/Bras
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long sleeve shirt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Short sleeve shirts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweatshirt or Sweater
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jeans/Khakis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shorts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Belt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Skirts/Dresses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Workout clothes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pajamas
<input type="checkbox"/>	Light Jacket
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nice outfit with smart shoes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandals/Sneakers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimsuit
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beach towel/ bath towels
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shower shoes

Toiletries

<input type="checkbox"/>	Toothbrush/toothpaste
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deodorant
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sanitary products
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact lens solution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra prescription glasses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brush/Comb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shaving Razor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nail Clippers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Makeup
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prescribed medication
<input type="checkbox"/>	Over the counter medication
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunscreen
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Extras

<input type="checkbox"/>	Laptop/tablet
<input type="checkbox"/>	MP3 player
<input type="checkbox"/>	Earphone/Headphones
<input type="checkbox"/>	USB cable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Charger
<input type="checkbox"/>	Backpack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alarm clock
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital camera
<input type="checkbox"/>	Money belt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dictionary/language app
<input type="checkbox"/>	Umbrella
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sun hat
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical Adapter
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