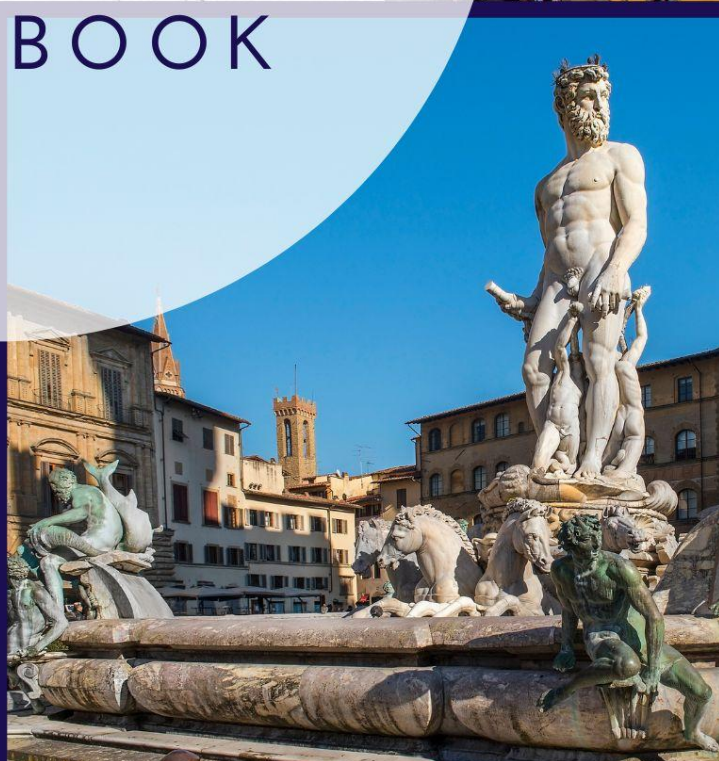




AIFS
Abroad.

FLORENCE
SPRING 2026
PRE-DEPARTURE
HANDBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

YOUR AIFS TEAM

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**

US Program Manager | Karen Winslow

E-mail: kwinslow@aifs.com

Ensure you have completed your pre-program to-do list by logging onto the AIFS portal via www.aifscustomized.com

Your AIFS Team in Florence

Florence Student Services

Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
50122 Firenze
Office & 24hr duty: (+39) 055 2399 236
E-mail: florence@aifs.co.uk

Program Director

Alan Earhart | E-mail: aeahart@aifs.co.uk

Deputy Director & Student Experience Coordinator

Gina Baxter | E-mail: gbaxter@aifs.co.uk

Your AIFS team work closely with your faculty to plan the program and coordinate all aspects including academic planning, housing and social and cultural activities.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFO

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, use these numbers:

Emergency number in U.S.

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

1-203-399-5420 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

055 239 9236 or **+39 055 239 9236** (if calling from non-Italian number)

Medical or security related emergency

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

- **(888) 505 2474 | (203) 399 5130**
- **Whatsapp (743) 244 2474** (if calling from non-US number, include +1 before prefix)
- E-mail: CISIAssist@RobinAssist.com

Check your AIFS insurance card for your policy number (provided by CISI, our partner.)

Always remember to inform the staff first about your sickness so that they can follow up with you and to fill out the insurance claim form online after going to the doctor.

Emergency services in Florence

General emergencies (911): **112**

Includes all major emergencies including police, fire, & ambulance services

U.S. Embassy

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

www.usembassy.gov

BEFORE YOU GO

To do list:

- Please read all the information and documents on your AIFS student portal: www.aifsabroad.com/login
- Apply for or renew your passport if necessary
- 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
- Let AIFS know of any pre-existing conditions that you may need support or accommodations for
- 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 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)



INTRODUCTION TO YOUR DESTINATION

Florence is the capital city of the region of Tuscany and one of the most famous cities in Italy as the birthplace of the Renaissance. Famous for its museums, architecture and artwork among other things, the beauty of Florence has long made it a popular destination for tourists and students alike.

The city dates back to the Roman era, founded as military colony around 59 BC. Due to rapid development over the centuries very few of the Roman monuments remain in the city. Florence gained its prominence as a European center for commerce, finance, and mainly the arts between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Famous Florentine figures include Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Dante and Galileo among others. To this day the city has remained an important cultural, economic, political and artistic center.

Population

As of 2025, there are around 362,353 people living in the city of Florence while approximately 989,360 live within the entire urban area.

Florence is divided into 5 districts, each with a certain level of independence as they manage their own local services.

There are 3 train stations and 1 airport that service the city.

Weather and Climate

Weather conditions in Florence are controlled by its location in a small valley surrounded by hills, lending to a changeable, subtropical Mediterranean climate. Summers tend to be extremely hot and humid, while winters are cool and wet. Average temperatures for July and August are around 89°F (32°Celsius) with an average daytime high of 95°F. (35° Celsius). In the winter, average temperature for January is 41°F (5° Celsius). Winters tend to be short lived, ending in mid-March and bring consistent rain. These showers can persist into April, however the most enjoyable seasons tend to be late spring and fall when the sun does not scorch.

The weather and climate can be checked here:

<https://weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-Rainfall-Temperature-Sunshine,Florence,Italy>



Language and Demographics

Italian is the official language of Florence, and actually standard Italian is based off of the Florentine dialect. It was adopted by the state after the unification of Italy.

The majority of the city's population is Italian, however there is a strong community of immigrants from countries such as China, Romania, Albania and Peru which make up around 15% of the foreigner population.

Sport and Culture

Soccer is overwhelmingly the most favored sport in Italy and Florence is part of the Serie A top league, represented by the home team ACF Fiorentina or "La Viola". The city is also home to the main training ground of the Italian National team and the technical department of the Italian Football Federation.

Florence attracts millions of tourists each year due to its high concentration of important artwork and architecture. The historic city center has been listed as a UNESCO world heritage site and contains numerous museums and art galleries devoted to painting and sculpture such as the Uffizi, Accademia, Bargello and the Palazzo Pitti.

The National Central Library, or Biblioteca Nazionale, has served as the Italian library of deposit since 1870 and houses a copy of every book published in the country.

LOCAL COMMUNICATION

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY BACK HOME IS IMPORTANT AND LUCKILY IT IS EASIER THAN EVER.

WHILE UPDATING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA IS NICE, NOTHING BEATS GETTING A REAL LETTER IN THE MAIL! IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY OF THIS INFORMATION, PLEASE EMAIL FLORENCE@AIFS.CO.UK

INTERNET ACCESS

Naturally, using the internet is the main way to keep in contact with friends and loved ones back home, be it by email, Instagram, Whatsapp or video calls. As part of the program you will have access to wireless internet. It can be slower/less reliable than in the USA, so bear that in mind. Any illegal streaming/downloading will not be tolerated.

AIFS study centers and/or offices have free Wi-Fi access, available for students to connect during office hours. Students can email documents to AIFS for printing or use AIFS facilities. Many cafés and restaurants will also have customer Wi-Fi, though you may have to ask the waiting staff for a password.

YOUR US SMARTPHONE

Most of us are very attached to our phones. If you are planning on bringing your smartphone, which would be normal, please consider these points:

- Make sure it is insured. (Thieves like them.)
- Contact your US phone service provider before departure. (Calls from abroad can be expensive)
- Set up an international plan or data roaming package. (Can be \$25+ for 100MB)
- Know how to turn off data roaming and use your phone with (free) available Wi-Fi networks only or local/E-Sim cards.
- For some programs, an international plan with your home provider is likely to be your best option.

Students primarily use phones through Wi-Fi networks, only turning on data as a necessity (to navigate using Google maps, for example.)

ADAPTING TO A NEW COUNTRY

Living and studying in Florence can be a very rewarding experience for anyone who is willing to adapt to a different culture and lifestyle. Contact with locals in your daily routine, the opportunity to communicate in a different language and the privilege of living in a foreign country are only some of the advantages of such an experience.

Nevertheless, remember that integration into the Florentine lifestyle is often a gradual process. Many things that are taken for granted in the USA are often viewed from a different perspective by Italians. Maintaining an American lifestyle in Florence will be time consuming & expensive and students will save money and gain experience by accepting local standards of living and local customs. Therefore, to gain the most from this valuable experience you should try to be as open-minded as possible.

SIM CARDS AND US CELLPHONES

Some students purchase a cell phone on arrival. Avoid agreeing to a permanent subscription or providing credit card details, this is meant for long term residents only.

One big difference from the USA is that it does not cost anything to receive calls on an Italian cell phone. However, there is a charge to make local calls and you may find that cell-phone-to cell-phone calls cost more than in the U.S. Calling the U.S. directly from an Italian cell phone can be expensive and is not recommended if not included as part of your phone plan.

Prices vary but €20-€40 will get you a SIM card with phone call & data credit. More detailed information will be available upon arrival. A cell phone purchased in Italy can be used in other European countries; however, you may have to pay roaming charges if traveling outside the EU. You will be required to show ID (passport) when purchasing a SIM card.

EUROPEAN SIM CARDS AND US CELLPHONES

You can purchase an Italian SIM card to use in a U.S. cell phone, provided that your phone is unlocked and compatible. Some U.S. providers can unlock your phone for you for a charge before you leave the U.S. Be advised that this may void your warranty so you are no longer covered in the event of loss, damage or theft.

INTERNET BASED PHONE SERVICES

There are many different services available which allow you to use your laptop or smart phone to call other users for free. Zoom zoom.us/ is a popular online video chat option. Google Hangouts provides a similar service and calls (over Wifi) to some US numbers are free! For users of Apple products, [FaceTime](https://www.apple.com/face-time/) is very popular. All require an internet connection, and the quality of your call can vary greatly depending on signal strength.

MAIL

Having items mailed to you while abroad can be a lengthy process so please make sure you are aware of the information required. For short-term programs, we do not recommend having items mailed to you as they are frequently delayed and may arrive after you have left the program location. AIFS may be able to ship items back if postage is paid in advance.

If you find that you are missing an item that you need urgently, try to find the equivalent locally – just ask your AIFS advisors! If you must have something mailed, consider an express or private courier service.

Your mailing address will be:

**YOUR NAME
C/O AIFS
PIAZZA DEI PERUZZI 1
50122 FIRENZE
ITALY**

AIFS requests that students use the AIFS office address, above, to have mail sent to them. We do not have access to mailboxes at student apartments or homestays. Mail is generally delivered during AIFS office hours so we can receive it and keep it safe for you until you collect.

Regular mail to or from the U.S. takes at least one week, but usually longer. On receiving a parcel you usually have to pay a small fee (a customs tax) for parcels sent from the U.S. Usually this applies if the stated value of the parcel is over \$20. If you wish to send important items, FedEx or UPS are safer / quicker and you can track the package.

Note to parents and friends: When sending care packages or parcels, state on the customs declaration that you are sending **“used personal items”** otherwise they may be held

at customs as if you were importing goods. If this happens there will be delays in delivery and often high customs (import) fees to pay.

Please do not send prescription drugs / vitamins / contact lenses / cosmetics / food / electronics or anything that could be mistaken for these items. They will be stopped at customs, lots of paperwork will be requested and taxes will have to be paid.

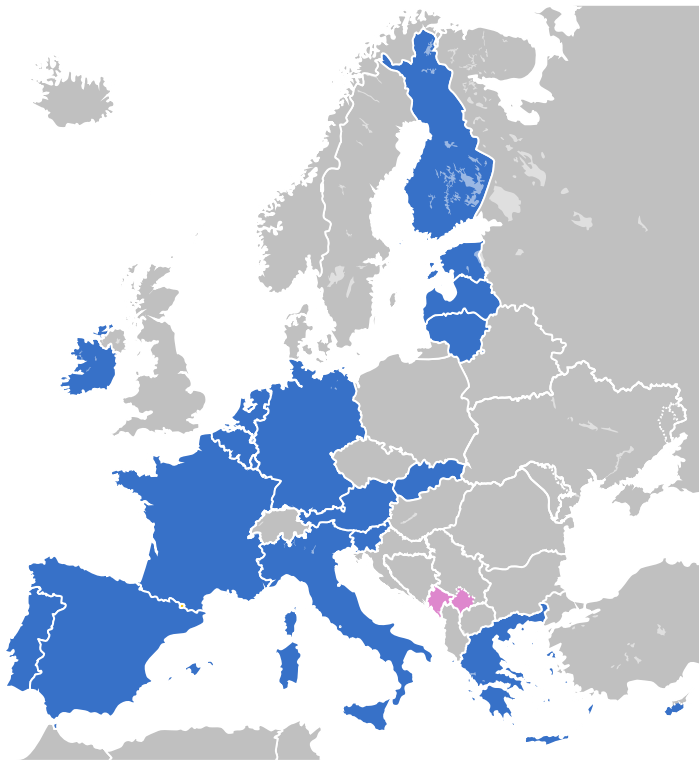


MONEY

USING AN ATM MACHINE TO WITHDRAW CASH WITH YOUR DEBIT CARD AND HAVING ACCESS TO A CREDIT CARD AND/OR A TRAVEL MONEY CARD ARE THE SAFEST AND SIMPLEST WAYS TO ACCESS MONEY. IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO USE A COMBINATION OF AT LEAST TWO METHODS SO THAT YOU ARE COVERED IN THE MAJORITY OF SITUATIONS.

CURRENCY

The main currency used throughout most of Europe is the Euro- but this does not include the UK, Switzerland, Scandinavia, the Czech Republic and other “new member states” in Eastern Europe. More information is available [here](#) and in the map below.



If possible, you should get some Euros prior to your departure from the U.S. Having some cash on you is handy for refreshments while traveling and if you arrive late at night. Check www.xe.com for current exchange rates.

WE ADVISE NOT BRINGING U.S. DOLLARS WITH YOU.

Many places will not change cash while those that do tend to charge high commission rates. If family and friends want

to give you money as a gift before departing advise them to place it directly into your bank account so you can access it through the ATM once abroad.

In foreign currency, coins are used more frequently and banknotes have different sizes and colors. It is worth taking the time to familiarize yourself with the currency before arrival.

Please do not carry around large sums of cash. If it is lost or stolen there is no way to replace it and it is generally not covered by insurance.

ACCESSING CASH – USING YOUR DEBIT CARD

In almost all cases your U.S. debit cards can access money from foreign ATMs. All you need is your 4-digit PIN number. Withdrawing a large sum of cash in the beginning and keeping it in a safe place at home and carrying only what you need daily is generally a good way to cut down on fees.

Please pay attention to exchange rates and any out of network / overseas transaction fees your bank will charge in the U.S. These vary depending on your bank and can be an unwelcome surprise. 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.

Also, check before you leave the U.S. to see if your bank has a relationship with any foreign banks which might save you some money in withdrawal fees.

TRAVEL MONEY CARDS AND BANKING APPS

Gaining popularity as a back up to a regular bank account are pre-paid cards, such as [Visa Travel Money](#). Available in the U.S. before departure, they work in the same way as regular debit/credit cards by using a PIN number 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.

Banking apps are also another way to preload US dollars into global currency. They often have low fees for ATM transactions and may allow you to switch between currencies. Revolut is commonly used. www.revolut.com/

Check before you leave the U.S. to see if your bank has a relationship with any foreign banks which might save you

some money in withdrawal fees. For example, Bank of America customers are in the same network as Deutsche Bank, which means students will not be charged for withdrawals when using those ATMs.

BANKING

It is very important that you contact your bank and inform them when and where you will be overseas.

They may block your account when they see purchases abroad and getting them unblocked can be frustrating and take time.

Make sure you separate any joint checking/savings accounts you have before you leave the U.S. Such accounts do not exist in foreign countries and therefore ATMs cannot access your card details. You will only be able to access money from your checking account so please make sure that you transfer funds 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 is a good idea to sign up for that service, so you can manage your money more effectively.

We suggest that you leave home with two different cards or ways to access funds.

EMERGENCY MONEY TRANSFERS

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.

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.

PACKING

DECIDING WHAT TO PACK AND WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND CAN BE DIFFICULT. PAST STUDENTS HAVE OFTEN FELT THAT THEY BROUGHT MORE CLOTHES AND BELONGINGS THAN WERE NECESSARY.

PACK LIGHT - IT IS MUCH EASIER TO GET AROUND.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THESE KEY POINTS:

- **YOU WILL HAVE TO CARRY YOUR ENTIRE LUGGAGE YOURSELF (AIRPORT/ PLANE/ BUS/ TAXI/ STAIRS).**
- **AIRPLANE LUGGAGE ALLOWANCES ARE STRICT BUT REASONABLE. (ONE CHECKED BAG, MAXIMUM WEIGHT 50LBS / 23KGS AND ONE CARRY ON, MAXIMUM WEIGHT 17.6LBS / 8KGS SHOULD BE ENOUGH.)**
- **IF YOU ARE IN AN APARTMENT OR HOMESTAY, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT YOUR ACCOMMODATION WILL NOT HAVE AN ELEVATOR. (PREPARE FOR LOTS OF STAIRS).**
- **CLOSET SPACE WILL BE LIMITED AND YOU MAY NOT HAVE MANY CLOTHES HANGERS.**
- **IF YOU ARE TRAVELING AFTER THE PROGRAM, YOU WILL HAVE TO TAKE YOUR BAGS WITH YOU OR STORE THEM SOMEWHERE.**
- **IF YOU WANT TO BUY SOUVENIRS, LEAVE SOME SPACE FOR THEM IN YOUR LUGGAGE. YOU'LL NEED IT ON THE RETURN LEG.**

LUGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Please check with your airline before you fly as luggage allowances vary. For example, British Airways allows you to have one checked piece of luggage, weighing no more than 23kg (50lbs) for free. If your bag weighs more than 23kg (50lbs) then you will be charged \$150.

Most intercontinental airlines also allow one standard size carry-on and one small “accessory” (small purse/laptop bag/camera bag), so this should be plenty.

If this is not enough for you, you can pay extra to take a second bag, but remember, you will be responsible for carrying it!

TRAVEL TIPS

- Have a sturdy label on your luggage and attach something (sticker/belt) to identify it easily.
- Pack spare socks/underwear, pyjamas, a change of clothes and a few toiletries in your carry-on bag in case your checked baggage gets delayed.
- Make sure any liquids you are transporting are securely wrapped to prevent leaks in your luggage.



WEATHER

Please research typical climate in your study abroad destination if you are not familiar with what to expect. Most hotels will have A/C but if you are in an apartment or homestay, it is unlikely that you will have air conditioning as it consumes a lot of electricity. The price of utilities is generally much higher compared to the U.S.

CLOTHING

Only bring some of your favorite, comfortable clothes that you know you will wear. There are stores worldwide with clothes at reasonable prices and we've found most

students want to buy at least one piece of clothing while studying abroad.

You will be living in the heart of a busy city, not a college campus. One of the best ways to fit into your new surroundings is to think about what you are wearing. At all times of year when visiting churches, you need to have your legs and shoulders covered.

Do Bring

- Clothing that you can re-wear and layer. E.g. jeans, long and short-sleeved t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters etc.
- Comfortable socks and underwear. You may also want to bring some footwear to wear in the house.
- Shoes that keep your feet warm, dry and are comfortable for lots of walking. You will walk a lot!
- A coat that will keep you warm and dry, and a hat and gloves if coming in winter months.
- Sports shoes or sneakers if you plan to take part in any sporting activities.

Don't Bring

- Too many dressy outfits, as opportunities to wear them can be limited. However, many clubs will only admit people who are dressed appropriately (sneakers and/or jeans not recommended).

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE ADEQUATE INSURANCE FOR ANY PERSONAL EFFECTS SUCH AS DIGITAL CAMERAS, LAPTOPS ETC. THAT YOU MAY BE CONSIDERING BRINGING.

- Clothing with special washing instructions (e.g. "dry clean only").
- Clothes you might wear. Only bring things you are sure to wear.



PRACTICAL ITEMS

Do Bring

- Your ATM and/or credit card(s). You will need access to funds and having more than one option is a good idea.
- Photocopy of your passport / credit card / driving license. (Just in case you misplace originals).
- Your laptop and/or iPad/tablet device. Don't forget the chargers.
- Adapter for any electrics. Your US plugs will not work abroad.
- If you use prescription medicine, please bring enough for the duration of the program, in original bottles and with a copy of the prescription.
- Contact lens supplies; bring enough for the duration of the program. Remember to pack your glasses as well.
- A bath towel and hand towel

Don't Bring

- Bed-linen or pillows - these are all provided.
- School supplies. Paper, folders etc., they can be purchased abroad (paper sizes are different to the U.S.).
- Anything that will distress you if you lose it or it gets broken in transit.
- Hairdryers and straighteners - the electrical voltage is different, which prevents US hairdryers from working abroad. Both are available relatively cheaply and you can maybe even share the cost with your roommates.

EMBASSY REGISTRATION



Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

A SERVICE OF THE BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS
U.S. Department of State



FOR SECURITY REASONS AIFS STRONGLY ADVISES ALL ITS STUDENTS TO REGISTER WITH THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT BEFORE LEAVING THE U.S. WE ARE UNABLE TO DO THIS FOR YOU – YOU MUST DO IT INDIVIDUALLY ON-LINE. YOU WILL NEED YOUR PASSPORT INFORMATION BEFORE YOU CAN DO THIS. ADD THE EMAIL ADDRESS YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE TRAVEL WARNINGS, PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS AND OTHER INFORMATION FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT.

GO TO THE FOLLOWING WEBSITE:

[HTTPS://STEP.STATE.GOV/STEP/](https://step.state.gov/step/)

1. Click on Create Account.
2. Tick the box to agree to the Privacy Act Notice terms.
3. Click on Account Information and fill out the password and security information – note this down and keep it somewhere safe. Fill out as many details as possible.
4. Add Traveler Information including your Passport number. One form of contact information must be entered here – home address, telephone number, e mail address.
5. Add Emergency contact information – please enter as much information as possible to allow the State Department to contact your next of kin in the event of an emergency while you are abroad.
6. Confirm your account details and click Finish. This will now take you back to your Profile Information.
7. From here you should click on Add Trip/Residence Abroad; this will take you to the Itinerary page.

8. Under Itinerary Info – please enter your first location under Destination Information as follows:

Country	Italy
Local Embassy	Rome
Date of Arrival / Departure	
Purpose of Visit	“Study Abroad” and give the name of your home college.

9. Since you are travelling, we recommend putting your US phone number, if you will be reachable on it while travelling. Otherwise, or in addition, under Address please enter as follows:

Destination Type	School
Address Line 1	AIFS
Address Line 2	Piazza dei Peruzzi 1
City	Florence
Post Code	50122
Country	Italy

Phone number: +39 055 2399236

10. Additional Traveler Information
You can skip this section.
11. Travel Info – you will then see any relevant information recently issued about your destination country.
12. Finally, you should confirm the summary of information. When you click on Finish it will take you back to the Profile page from where you can logout or add other trips, if necessary.

If you have any difficulty with the above process, please contact AIFS.