



LONDON PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK

FALL 2022



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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 out of your time in London 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.

Karen Winslow

American Institute For Foreign Study

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Stamford, CT 06905

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

Your AIFS Team in the UK

AIFS Student Center

Taylor House

2 Elvaston Place, SW7 5QH

Office: (+44) 207 636 0761

24 hr Duty cell phone: (011 44) 77153 73105

E-mail: studentinfo@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 site with your program. 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.

1-203-399-5000 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 the U.K.

24 hr Duty cell phone: 07715373105

From an US phone dial 011 44 07715373105

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
- (603) 952-2660

E-mail: mail@oncallinternational.com

Please quote: Policy CC005423

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

Emergency services in the U.K.

Emergencies 999

(including all major emergencies, fire, police, medical)

U.S. Embassy

U.S. Embassy in London 020 7499 9000

U.S. Consulate in Edinburgh 0131 556 8315

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 or follow a useful blog
- 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

Well, where do we start? Although there were settlements of one form or another along the banks of the Thames for several thousand years before their arrival, the Romans are the real founding fathers of London. Under the leadership of the Emperor Claudius, the Romans established the port of Londinium in 43AD. By the year 200 a forum and amphitheatre had also been constructed (such was the way of the Romans) and all in all Londinium was already starting to be a happening place. There was a brief lull in around 410AD when the Romans left Britain and the city fell into ruin. From 841 onward there were various battles between the Saxons and the Danes. Westminster Abbey and Palace were founded towards the end of this period. Britain was invaded in 1066 and London fell under the control of William the Conqueror. Despite the frequent fires and mishaps the city still flourished, becoming a major trading capital. By the year 1300 there were 100,000 people living in London.

London is as much about wide-open vistas and leafy landscape escapes as it is high-density, sight-packed urban exploration. Central London is where the major museums, galleries and most iconic sights congregate, but visit Hampstead Heath or the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to flee the crowds and frolic in wide open green expanses. You can also venture further out to Kew Gardens, Richmond or Hampton Court Palace for beautiful panoramas of riverside London followed by a pint in a quiet waterside pub.

London is deeply multicultural, with one in three Londoners foreign-born, representing 270 nationalities and 300 tongues. The UK may have voted for Brexit (although the majority of Londoners didn't), but for now London remains one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities, and diversity infuses daily life, food, music and fashion. It even penetrates intrinsically British institutions; the British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum have collections as varied as they are magnificent, while the flavours at centuries-old Borough Market run the full global gourmet spectrum

Life in London

Living and studying in London can be a very rewarding experience for the American who is willing to adapt to a different culture and lifestyle. The opportunity to communicate with a diverse range of people and the privilege of living in one of the most exciting capitals of the world are some of the advantages of such an experience. Nevertheless, one should be aware that integration into the British lifestyle is often a gradual process. Maintaining an American lifestyle in London can be expensive and students will save money and gain experience by accepting local standards of living and local traditions. Therefore, in order to gain the most from this valuable experience one should try to be as open-minded as possible. While the United States and United Kingdom speak the same language, the customs and traditions are different. Take advice from Student Services about how to adjust to life in London.

Sport and Culture

In 2012 London hosted an awe-inspiring and successful Olympic Games. The Olympics reaffirmed London's status in the world as a city of leadership, innovation and inspiration and a truly global capital.

London hosts numerous professional soccer teams who play in England's Premier League; Arsenal (North London), Tottenham (North London), West Ham (East London), Fulham (West London), Chelsea (West London), Brentford (West London) and Crystal Palace (South London).

There is a huge music scene in London, with most bands making sure that they stop off in the capital whilst on tour. The city is known as a world-class "stage" for theater, with the West End being the equivalent to Broadway in New York, as well as historical theaters and replicas such as Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and a thriving fringe theater, comedy and alternative scene as well. Street performances are also very popular occurrences, particularly in the main squares and Thames-side paths, where they can often draw a crowd.

COMMUNICATION

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

WHILE UPDATING YOUR FACEBOOK STATUS IS NICE, NOTHING BEATS GETTING A REAL LETTER IN THE MAIL!

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY OF THIS INFORMATION, PLEASE EMAIL STUDENTINFO@AIFS.CO.UK

INTERNET ACCESS

We realize that the internet is the main way people keep in contact by using email, Facebook, Twitter and video chats. As part of the program you will have access to wireless internet. It can be slower/less reliable than in the USA and any illegal streaming/downloading will not be tolerated.

AIFS study centers and/or offices have free WiFi access that students can use during office hours. Students can print documents at Taylor House. Many cafés and restaurants also have WiFi. Normal practice is they will give you the password when you make a purchase.

YOUR US SMARTPHONE

We've all become very attached to our smartphones. If you are planning on bringing your smartphone, please consider these points:

- Make sure it is insured. (Thieves like them.)
- Contact your US phone service provider before departure. (Calls from Europe can be \$1/min)
- Check the prices and decide if you want an international plan or data roaming package. (Can be \$25+ for 100MB)
- Know how to turn off data roaming on your phone and use it with (free) available WiFi networks only.
- Depending on the length of your program, an international plan with your home provider may be your best option.

Students with smartphones have mainly used them with free WiFi networks only turning on data roaming when there was no other option or in times of need e.g. to look at maps.

BUYING A LOCAL CELLPHONE

Some students purchase a cell phone on arrival. Most work on a pay-as-you-go basis with pre-paid minutes.

One big difference from the USA is that it does not cost anything to receive calls on a UK 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 a UK cell phone will be expensive and is not recommended.

Prices vary but €30-€60 will get you a basic phone and SIM card with some phone call credit. More detailed information will be available upon arrival. A cell phone purchased in UK can be used in other European countries; however, you will have to pay roaming charges. You will often be required to show ID (passport) when purchasing a phone.

UK SIM CARDS AND US CELLPHONES

You can purchase a UK 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.

A SIM card and a basic plan will cost between £10-15 per month. The main providers often have offers so please ask and check with AIFS Staff before making your purchase.

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](#) is very popular. All require an internet connection, and the quality of your call can vary greatly depending on signal strength.

If you plan on using this method to keep in touch, we advise doing a test run before you depart. Don't forget the considerable time difference. Also, please call at sensible times and be considerate to roommates.

MAIL

For short-term programs, we strongly recommend not planning to have items mailed to you as they are frequently delayed and may arrive after you have left the program location. AIFS will only be able to ship items back if postage is paid in advance.

If you find you are missing an item that you need urgently, you may be able to find the equivalent locally; quicker and possibly cheaper. If you must have something mailed, consider an express courier service.

Your mailing address will be:

YOUR NAME
AIFS TAYLOR HOUSE
2 ELVASTON PLACE
LONDON, SW7 5QH
UK

AIFS requests that students use the AIFS address above as we do not always have access to mailboxes at student apartments or homestays, and we can sign for a parcel and during office hours and keep it safe for you.

Regular mail to or from the U.S. takes at least one week, but usually longer. On receiving a parcel you may 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 \$50. 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 customs (import) fees to pay.

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



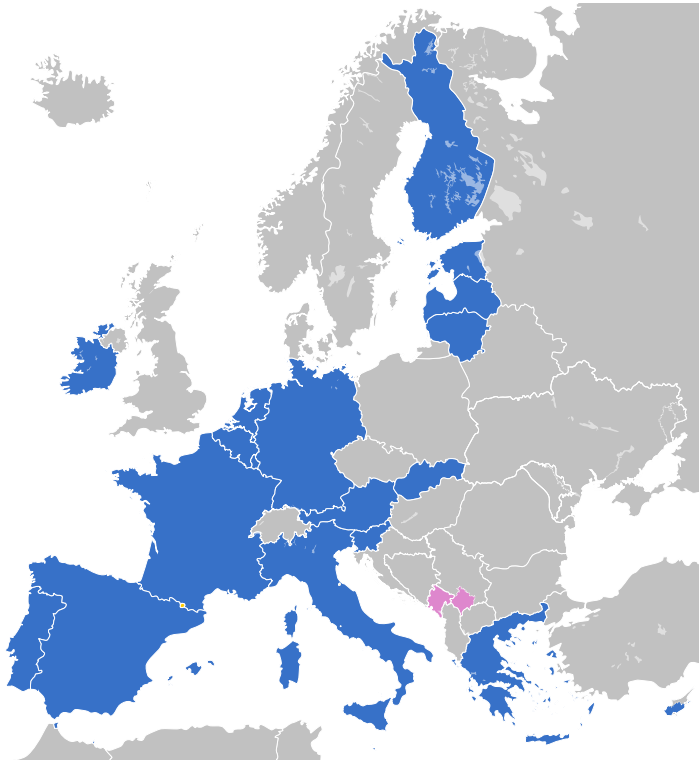
MONEY

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 Pounds 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 it 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 that are available in the U.S before departure, which 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.

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.

TIPPING

Finally, let's talk tipping. As a rule, people in the UK don't tip excessively. Most people employed in the service industry are paid a reasonable wage, therefore, only tip if they have received good service. You may also note that a small surcharge is already levied depending on the size of the group, whether you are sitting at the bar, or out on the terrace. You are not expected to tip in bars or taxis.

The finer points of tipping will be discussed on arrival during your program orientation .



PACKING

DECIDING WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND CAN BE DIFFICULT. PAST STUDENTS NEARLY ALWAYS FIND THAT THEY BROUGHT MORE BELONGINGS THAN NECESSARY.

TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR CLOTHING CHOICES, WE RECOMMEND CHECKING THE AVERAGE WEATHER CONDITIONS FOR THE TIME THAT YOU WILL BE ABROAD.

PACK LIGHT, IT IS MUCH EASIER TO GET AROUND.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND A FEW 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 IS 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.**
- **DON'T FORGET IF YOU BUY SOUVENIRS, THEY WILL TAKE UP SPACE IN YOUR LUGGAGE ON THE RETURN LEG.**

WEATHER

Please research typical climate in your study abroad destination if you are not familiar with what to expect. Some hotels will have A/C but if you are in student accommodation or a 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.

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 at least \$100.

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.

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



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 will add to their clothes collection.

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 are usually limited. However, if you do like to go out in the evening, many clubs will only admit people who are suitably dressed (no sneakers and/or jeans).
- Clothing with special washing instructions (e.g. "dry clean only").
- Clothes you might wear. Only bring things you are sure to wear.
- Hairdryer or straighteners (as these run on different voltages in the UK)



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.
- Towels (Only one bath towel and maybe a small hand towel, no more).
- 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.

Don't Bring

- Bed linen or pillows - these are all provided.
- School supplies. Paper, folders etc., they can be purchased abroad
- 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.

TRAVELING

DURING YOUR STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM, YOU MAY HAVE FREE WEEKENDS DURING WHICH YOU CAN TRAVEL. TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS OPPORTUNITY, IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO DO SOME RESEARCH BEFORE THE PROGRAM STARTS. WHEN YOU ARRIVE, AIFS STAFF WILL GIVE YOU PLENTY OF ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE EMAIL US.

IF YOU WANT TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF YOUR STUDY ABROAD 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. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW AND EVALUATE ANY TOUR COMPANY, TRANSPORTATION PROVIDER AND HOTEL/HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION YOU CHOOSE TO USE.

2. There are often extra charges for online check-in, checked baggage, early boarding, insurance, credit card processing fees etc. Pay attention to what you're opting into and out of as the cheap fare might not stay cheap for very long with all the extras.
3. Airports described as Paris (Beauvais) or Barcelona (Girona), for example, may not be that close to the city. (Beauvais is 90 minutes from Paris; Girona is 1hr from Barcelona).

TRAIN

Trains in the UK are comfortable, reliable and a great way to explore the country.

If you book far enough in advance you may find some deals but always be aware of holidays, long-weekends and festivals as the network can get very busy. You can book at automated machines or counters directly at the station, but these are usually more expensive than booking online, when you have that option. The train websites will have details and prices of trains.

London has five principle mainline train stations. All are connected by the London Underground. It is confusing at first, so please get in touch with AIFS staff if you have any questions before booking.

Taking the train to other European countries can be slow and relatively expensive. A good starting point for exploring the options for cross Europe travel is www.raileurope.com. Popular highspeed international routes include London to Paris, and Paris to Amsterdam.

BUS

Sometimes the cheapest way to get around the UK is by bus. They have come on leaps and bounds in recent years and now come with comfy seats, movies and WiFi on board, and in some countries don't take much longer than the train, at half the price!

Popular companies include Mega Bus (uk.megabus.com) and National Express (www.nationalexpress.com)

Most buses have a bathroom, make regular stops and you do get to see some of the countryside en route.

AIR

The key to getting cheap deals is being flexible about departure times and booking as early as possible.

Skyscanner (www.skyscanner.net) is a handy website for checking out different flight options.

Budget Airlines

Ryanair (www.ryanair.com), EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) and Wizz Air (<https://wizzair.com/en-gb#>) are three of the most popular budget airlines in Europe.

When booking with a budget airline, be aware that...

1. The cheapest flight times are usually first thing in the morning or last thing at night when it can be expensive or inconvenient to get to the airport in time. Check your route to and from the airport before you book the flight.

CAR RENTAL

Fancy driving yourself? Renting a car in the UK is often more trouble than it's worth. Normally you have to be over 25 years of age, hold an international drivers license, the cars are stick shift, parking is a nightmare, gas is very expensive and there are plenty of traffic circles to negotiate! If you are really keen, talk to AIFS staff before booking.

WHERE TO STAY

Hostels

Don't be afraid of staying in a hostel. Modern hostels are clean and comfortable and are great places for getting tourist information and meeting people. Many hostels also have the option of a private room with bathroom. Take a look at www.hostelworld.com for more information, photos and guest reviews.

Hotels

There are a variety of options of hotels and guest houses to choose from. Rooms are much smaller than in the U.S, rarely have A/C and if they are booked for two people that is the maximum number allowed.

Prices vary hugely depending on location and season. Be aware of national and local holidays that will push up prices. Often rooms will come with breakfast included. Check previous guest reviews on www.tripadvisor.com and use an online map so you know exactly where it is located. A good place to start looking for hotels is www.trivago.com, that is a price comparison website for hotels.

Apartments

When traveling in a group, a private apartment could be an ideal option. Check out www.airbnb.com or www.vrbo.com and read previous reviews carefully.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)

In order to prove you are a student whilst abroad, it might be worth getting an International Student Identity Card. The cards are recognized in many destinations, providing discounts at hostels, movie theatres, museum entrances etc. www.isic.org

FURTHER RESEARCH

Take a look at the following resources. Don't forget most travel guides can be obtained in digital format and/or have an app you can download for your laptop/tablet.

Let's Go Travel Guides.

Written by students and updated each year:
www.letsgo.com.

Time Out.

Good city guides with mailing lists you can join:
www.timeout.com.

Lonely Planet.

Great travel guides and has a useful website:
www.lonelyplanet.com.

City Spy Maps/Guides.

A funny, alternative spin on European cities
www.thespymap.com



CULTURE SHOCK



Based on Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn & Gallahorn (1963)

Study Abroad can be a wonderfully exciting, rewarding, culturally enlightening and expanding experience, not forgetting what a great opportunity it is for personal growth and your own cultural competence! However, it can at times also be a stressful experience. Students are at a stage where a lot of transitions are taking place in their lives, and all students will experience and deal with these transitions in different ways. All transitions have common symptoms and stages - the symptoms may include irritability, frustration, disorientation, helplessness and withdrawal.

In transition experiences, first we may *fight* that which is new, or we may choose to take *flight* to escape the challenging situation. We may literally leave the environment or withdraw internally. Taking part in a study abroad program does not eliminate stresses students may have at home and may even exacerbate them. What may initially appear to be a crisis is just a normal developmental phase of adjustment known as 'culture shock'. We believe, the more you know about 'culture shock' the more equipped you will be to understand and deal with it.

But what is 'culture shock'? We could list many academic definitions but, to put it plainly, 'culture shock' can be defined as a clash between our own views of the world (which are determined by our home culture) and our new cultural environment. It can feel like we have a lack of control, that we are helpless in this new culture. 'Culture

shock' is a developmental phase that is common amongst study abroad students, it is normal to experience it. Culture shock is also often described as an adjustment cycle, initially we feel really excited and optimistic about going on a study abroad, we can't wait to get to the country we will be calling home for the next however long. This is the high point of the cycle or, what is often referred to as the 'honeymoon stage'. Then we hit the second phase or the low point of the cycle, 'the disintegration or crisis stage' where all we can see is difference, but not in a positive way; nothing works in the same way, food is different, it's not like home, we begin to miss our support system and all our creature comforts.

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

- **Honeymoon Phase –**

Occurs when you first arrive in a new culture. The excitement of being somewhere new and different!

- **Cultural Shock –**

May be noticeable after a few days or weeks. Those initially exciting cultural differences may now cause you to feel insecure or confused, as you struggle to understand the rules of the new culture you find yourself in. At this stage, you may find you miss your family and home support structures the most.

- **Initial Adjustment –**

You may find you feel irritated or frustrated with the cultural differences you come across in daily life: perhaps with the learning and teaching environment, or in your relationships with staff or other students, or with your accommodation. You will probably find you make comparisons with your home culture and decide you prefer home! You may be consciously or unconsciously assessing your own cultural values and trying to make sense of them.

- **Mental Isolation –**

You will by now probably worked out how to operate in your new cultural environment - how to satisfactorily interact with people and make friends, where to shop, eat and socialize, as well as to understand and cope with your new learning environment. You will most likely start to accept the differences between your home culture and those of the new culture and to feel more relaxed.

- **Acceptance and Integration –**

This brings with it a feeling of self-assurance and more complete understanding of your home and the new culture. Differences and similarities are valued and important and you feel confident about handling most or all situations.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER NOT EVERYONE WILL EXPERIENCE CULTURE SHOCK, SOME WILL FOR DIFFERING LENGTHS OF TIME, AND SOME MAY ONLY EXPERIENCE PARTS OF THE W-CURVE. TO HELP EASE THE TRANSITION KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOUR HOME COUNTRY, ENSURE YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT HOW YOU ARE FEELING. AND REMEMBER WHAT YOU MAY EXPERIENCE IS NORMAL AND THAT OTHER STUDENTS WILL BE FEELING THE SAME WAY AS YOU.

THIS IS JUST A GUIDE TO HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE EMOTIONS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING YOUR TIME ABROAD NO MATTER HOW SHORT.

(Source:

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/international/yearabroad/study/documents/culture.doc>)

SAFETY & SECURITY

AIFS HAS BEEN ARRANGING STUDY ABROAD FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS FOR OVER 50 YEARS AND WE HAVE HAD OVER 1.6 MILLION PARTICIPANTS ON OUR PROGRAMS.

ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS IS “IS IT SAFE TO STUDY ABROAD?” AS YOU PREPARE FOR THIS EXCITING EXPERIENCE, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT OUR PRIMARY CONCERN IS STUDENT SAFETY.

WE HOPE THE FOLLOWING WILL ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE AND HELP TO REASSURE YOU THAT WE TAKE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES VERY SERIOUSLY.

1) All students are asked to register with the “The Smart Traveler Enrolment Program” (STEP) before they arrive (instructions are in this handbook). We also keep copies on file of passports and photo ID of all current students when they subsequently arrive.

2) As part of the application process, all students are required to sign an Agreement and Release form and a Code of Conduct form, to acknowledge that they are responsible for the rules and requirements of program participation. Within the release, students agree that AIFS can inform their home school and parent(s) in the event of a health, safety or behavior issue. Upon arrival, students attend an orientation program, in which program rules and regulations will be reviewed. Students will sign an additional agreement confirming they have received full conduct information and that they understand the program rules, regulations, and disciplinary procedures.

3) AIFS provides detailed security briefings to students on behavior, local customs and general awareness in their Study Abroad location. We do not display signs saying American or U.S. outside our centers.

4) In addition to pre departure materials and orientations, students are provided with a student handbook that provides them with comprehensive information about their program, providing details and advice to use during their time abroad. The handbook also addresses the student role in helping to ensure their health and safety while abroad.

5) AIFS has a 24/7 emergency number that students or their families can use to reach AIFS staff in an emergency. AIFS has an incident response plan and all staff members are trained in how to handle any situation.

6) All students are given the number they need to call to reach the local emergency services (police, fire, ambulance), and are advised to call this in the event of serious incident, illness or injury. We ask that they also contact AIFS staff using our emergency procedures so that we can provide any additional assistance required. If a student needs to see a doctor or is hospitalized, AIFS staff will accompany/visit them.

7) We go to great lengths to be aware of the current whereabouts of all AIFS students. Of course, we know their addresses in their program location and our on-site staff is in close contact with them on a regular basis. We also require students to log their travel plans, addresses and contact details with us when travelling outside the city at weekends. We advise students to have a local phone plan and we record their phone numbers so that we can contact them easily.

8) We receive and monitor all U.S. State Department advisories and inform students of areas and Individuals can also look at State Department information on the web at this address: <http://travel.state.gov/>

9) In the event of the U.S. State Department issuing a specific Travel Warning that U.S. Citizens in any AIFS study abroad city should return to the USA, AIFS will consult with the home school and may suspend any currently operating program and assist with returning student to the U.S.

10) AIFS medical insurance provides extensive coverage for students (for more information <https://www.aifsabroad.com/customized/insurance.asp>). This includes a Team Assist plan which provides a worldwide 24-hour emergency telephone assistance service. Multilingual help and advice will be provided in the event of any emergency. Students have the option of purchasing additional trip cancellation insurance which allows them to protect their study abroad program. Details of the Worldwide Trip Protector Plans with travel insurance underwritten by the United States Fire Insurance Company, rated A (Excellent) by A.M. Best 2019, are available on the Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) website - www.culturalinsurance.com

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 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 our 24/7 emergency assistance provider, AXA Assistance. The details can be found on page 2.
- 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 and if you change it while abroad.
- Be sure to have personal identification with you at all times with the address and telephone number of your school, the AIFS office, the AXA Assistance details and the International Emergency Number. We suggest you memorize the address of your accommodation.
- 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 abroad; moderate drinking is a big part of socializing. Alcohol can impair your judgment—you cannot be alert if you have been drinking.
- 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. AIFS staff 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!

MENTAL HEALTH AND PRACTICING WELLNESS ABROAD

- 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, let the AIFS staff, your homestay parents, apartment sharers etc. know where you are going and when you expect to 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 your AIFS Program Coordinator 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, you should contact the appropriate authorities abroad and file a claim with your Insurance.

The emergency contact details are shown on page 2 of this handbook.



Although exciting, the study abroad process and travel can also be challenging. It is normal to experience increased levels of stress and anxiety as you become acclimated to a new culture and are experiencing myriad new foods and traditions. 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 Program Manager or AIFS Staff 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 work through it.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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 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 Program Manager or AIFS Staff 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

(<https://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 Admissions Officer 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. In addition to general resources, the above link will provide more information on the following topics.

Race & Ethnicity

Religion

Woman Abroad

Access & Mobility

Physical Disability

LGBTQIA+

First Generation Students

Veterans

Adult Learners

General Resources	Inclusion at AIFS Abroad	Student FAQs
Scholarships & Funding	First-Generation Resources	Race, Ethnicity & Studying Abroad
LGBTQIA+ Resources	Women Abroad	Access, Mobility & Disability Abroad
Adult Learners	Resources for Veterans Studying Abroad	Practicing Your Faith Abroad

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	UK
Local Embassy	London
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	Specific to program
Address Line 1	Specific to program
City	London
Province	London
Post Code	Specific to program
Country	UK
 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.