



Welcome!

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

Most of us at AIFS have studied abroad. We are here to help you plan for your overseas study and to make your transition abroad as easy as possible. Please call us if you have any questions concerning your program.

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. The AIFS social and cultural program will enable you to enjoy many events at reduced rates. Make the most of these opportunities to learn about Florence and all it offers.

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 handbook and do a little extra research before your departure. This will enable you to leave feeling more confident and prepared.

The most important thing to take with you is a positive attitude! It will help you adjust and enjoy life overseas more fully.

Please do not hesitate to contact AIFS for assistance, advice or guidance. The Florence Student Services staff can be contacted by e-mail prior to your departure at Florence@aifs.co.uk.

Enjoy your adventure!

The Partnership Programs Staff

Table of Contents

THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GO ABROAD	2
PASSPORTS	2
VISAS & ENTERING OTHER COUNTRIES	3
Entering Italy	3
REGISTRATION IN ITALY	4
IMMUNIZATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS	4
MONEY	5
ATM Cards	5
Traveler's Checks/Visa Travel Money	5
Credit Cards	5
Receiving Money from the U.S.	6
Emergency Money Transfers	6
Handling Foreign Currency	6
BUDGETING AND SPENDING MONEY	7
Sample Expenses	7
BAGGAGE TIPS	8
Transatlantic Baggage Regulations	9
European Baggage Regulations	10
WHAT TO PACK	11
Clothing	11
Practical Items	12
EUROPEAN TOURIST OFFICES	13
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)	13
PERSONAL SAFETY ABROAD	14
DRUG ARREST	15
LEGAL AID	16
AIFS Disciplinary Action	16
CULTURE SHOCK	17
Big City Life	18
ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS	18
IN FLORENCE	21
THE CITY OF FLORENCE	21
GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO YOUR RESIDENCE	21
Transit within Florence	22
ORIENTATION	22
HOUSING AND MEALS	22
Accommodations	22
Meals	24
COMMUNICATIONS	24
ACADEMIC LIFE	25
Italian Life and Culture	25
Libraries	25
Textbooks	25
COMPUTERS	25
Internet/E-mail Access	25
TRAVEL	26
Travel out of Florence	26
HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE	27
Counseling	27
CLIMATE	27
ELECTRICITY	27
SPORTS	28
Q & A	28

THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GO ABROAD

PASSPORTS

Students planning to study abroad need a valid passport for the duration of their stay overseas. If you have a passport that is scheduled to expire during your program or within four months after the end of your program, **renew it now. Do not delay.**

If you are applying for your first passport, you must present in person a completed Form DS-11, "Application for a U.S. Passport" at one of the several thousand Federal and State courts and U.S. post offices that accept passport applications. Check with those closest to your home. If they do not accept the applications, they will be able to recommend a place in your area that does.

To obtain a passport you will need:

- I. Completed Form DS-11: *Application for a U.S. Passport*
- II. Proof of Citizenship, including:
 - A. Previously issued passport or one in which you were included (e.g., family passport). If you are applying for your first passport or cannot submit a previous passport, you must submit other evidence of citizenship.
 - B. If you were born within the United States: A birth certificate that must show that the birth record was filed shortly after your birth and which must be Certified with the registrar's signature and raised, embossed or multicolored seal. ("Notifications of Birth Registration" and "Birth Announcements" are not normally accepted for passport purposes.)
 - C. If you were born abroad:
 - i. Certificate of Naturalization
 - ii. Certificate of Citizenship
 - iii. Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. (Form FS-240) or a Certification of Birth (Form DS-1350.)
- III. Identification (One of the following: Previously issued, undamaged U.S. passport; Naturalization Certificate; Valid Driver's License; Current Government ID (city, state or federal); Current Military ID (military and dependents))
- IV. Photocopy of the ID you will present when you apply (see above), and see the State Department's website for the proper format
- V. Two recent identical photographs, taken within the past six months and showing your current appearance. The photos must be 2" x 2" and in color.

For more information on applying for your first passport, visit the State Department's website at www.travel.state.gov/passport/get/first/first_830.html. For more information on renewing your passport, visit www.travel.state.gov/passport/renew/renew_833.html.

When you receive your passport, be sure to sign it and fill in the personal notification data. If your passport is lost or stolen within the United States, report the loss or theft immediately to Passport Services, Department of State, Washington D.C. 20520, or to the nearest passport agency. The loss or theft should also be reported to the local police authorities. For more information, call (877) 487-2778, or go to the State Department's website at http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html.

IF YOUR PASSPORT IS LOST OR STOLEN WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD, CONTACT THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE CLOSEST AMERICAN CONSULATE AND THE AIFS STAFF IMMEDIATELY.

VISAS & ENTERING OTHER COUNTRIES

A visa is an endorsement stamped into your passport by a foreign government allowing you to enter that particular country for a specific purpose and period of time. Visas are valid from the date on which they are issued.

Every country has its own immigration policies for visitors. Please make sure you have fulfilled all the necessary requirements before your departure. When entering other countries, prepare to be asked to explain why you are there, where you are staying and how long you will stay.

Entering Italy

U.S. Citizens

U.S. citizens staying in Italy on programs of 90 days or less do not require a visa. As you will not be enrolled in an Italian university, you will not require a student visa. When entering Italy, state that you are entering as a **tourist**.

Students extending their stay in Italy or in any of the Schengen countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) before or after the end of the program and thus exceeding 90 days will require a visa. Visit the Italian Embassy's website at www.italyemb.org for specific instructions, to learn which consulate you will use and which visa you will require.

Please note: If you plan to stay longer than 90 days, you will need to apply for a visa before departure from the U.S., from the Italian Embassy/Consulate appropriate to your state of residence. Be sure to obtain the necessary paperwork before going to the embassy/consulate. You will need a letter from your school, on their letterhead, listing all the details of your study abroad program. You also may need to show a round-trip plane ticket and proof of accommodation reservations during your travels either before or after the program. Within eight days of arrival in Italy, you also may need to apply for the "permesso di soggiorno," the permit allowing you to stay in Italy.

U.S. citizens staying in Italy on programs longer than 90 days will require a student visa. You will receive additional information from both your school and AIFS on how to apply.

Non-U.S. citizens (i.e., resident aliens, green card holders, etc.)

If you are not a U.S. citizen, it is your responsibility to obtain all necessary documentation:

1. Check to see if your passport is still valid. If it is not, renew it immediately.
2. Contact the embassy in Washington or nearest Consulate of the countries that you plan to visit or travel through (e.g., if you have a connecting flight in England) to learn if visas are necessary. **Please note that you may require a visa if you are only changing planes in a certain country, even if you will not be exiting the airport.**
3. Apply for all necessary visas at once. If you will be visiting only countries that are part of the Schengen Area, you will only need to apply for the Schengen visa. Please be aware that the

UK and Switzerland are non-Schengen countries and will require different documentation/visas.

4. If you are a permanent resident of the U.S., take your Resident Alien card abroad with you. You will be asked to show it to the U.S. Immigration Officials upon your return to the U.S.
5. Within eight days of arrival in Italy, you also may need to apply for the “permesso di soggiorno,” the permit allowing you to stay in Italy.

If you plan to travel to other countries during breaks or at the end of your study abroad program, it is your responsibility to find out what documentation is necessary for those countries.

REGISTRATION IN ITALY

Within 48 hours of arrival in Italy, all visitors, regardless of the length of their visit, are required to register with the local police and must provide their local address. AIFS handles your registration for you but requires some documentation from you. A photocopy of the information page of your passport MUST be submitted to AIFS with your program application. If you do not have your passport when you apply for the program, you must mail a copy to the AIFS Stamford, CT office as soon as you receive it. If you are unable to do this, you must bring the copy with you and hand it to the AIFS staff at orientation in Florence. There are NO exceptions to this. Failure to do this will mean you are not registered and that your presence in Italy is illegal.

This necessary registration also means that only those who registered at a specified address are able to stay there, so please arrange for visiting friends and family to stay in hotels, NOT in your apartment.

In addition, students must also register with the U.S. authorities before departing the U.S. by going online to <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>. You will create an account and register yourself directly with the Consulate. Please use the AIFS Florence mailing address found later in this handbook.

IMMUNIZATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

Check with your physician or student health service regarding immunization requirements for the countries you plan to visit. Make sure that childhood immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella; Combined Tdap Vaccine [diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis], etc.) are up-to-date.

Students, particularly those living away from home for the first time, have shown a marked vulnerability to **meningitis Group C**. As a result, students are strongly encouraged to receive an immunization against both Groups A and C prior to departure from the U.S. Check with your physician for specific details.

Be sure to schedule an appointment for a complete physical examination with your physician prior to departure. The AIFS *Medical Examination Form* found on our portal at www.aifspartnerships.com **must** be completed by your doctor and returned to AIFS no less than two weeks before you depart.

Use common sense when it comes to your health while you are abroad. The stress of travel and time change combined with a new daily routine can be unsettling at first. Be sure to eat well, drink plenty of fluids and get enough sleep. This will help you get through the adjustment phase at the start of your term abroad. Consider taking a multi-vitamin if you don't normally (be sure to bring some with you).

Always travel with any medications you use on a regular basis, as well as copies of your prescriptions. It is especially important to have a prescription on hand if you will be carrying insulin, syringes or narcotics. Make sure that all medications are carried in their original containers and that your name appears clearly on each label. Be sure you have the generic name of any prescription medication as brand names can vary between countries. Do not assume that prescriptions can be filled as easily overseas as they can be in the U.S. If possible, bring enough medication to last the entire trip. Those with chronic medical problems should have their physician fully document their case, listing any necessary medications. Carry this documentation with you and be sure to inform the AIFS staff in case there is a problem. It is best not to have medication mailed from the U.S. to Italy as it will be stopped at customs, and you will have to pay for its release.

If you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, be sure to take an extra pair of glasses and a copy of your prescription with you. It is also helpful to leave an extra prescription with someone at home so that they can send you a replacement pair in an emergency. Contact lens wearers will want to bring their care products (solutions, tablets, eye drops, etc.) with them abroad as the cost of these products is very high overseas.

MONEY

ATM cards, traveler's checks and credit cards are the safest and simplest ways to carry and obtain money as you will not be able to open a bank account in Florence. Information on various currency options follows.

ATM Cards

Perhaps the most efficient means of accessing your money is via cash dispenser networks. The *Plus* and *Cirrus* networks can be accessed from several cash machines in Florence, allowing cash to be withdrawn from a U.S. bank account if you have a card that is linked to one of these systems. Students should check with their local banks for ATM capabilities and related costs in Europe. Make sure you get a **four-digit PIN code** that does not start with a "0" from your bank before leaving the U.S.

Traveler's Checks/Visa Travel Money

Traveler's checks are used far less frequently than they used to be, and with cards like the Visa Travel Money card, you may not find them particularly necessary. **Visa Travel Money** is a prepaid credit/debit card that you preload and reload with funds at any time. It's a good way to manage funds, and if you lose the card, a replacement can be obtained quickly, wherever you are. Beware of the commission charged, however, and consider bringing at least a few traveler's checks as a back-up.

Credit Cards

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. VISA is the most widely accepted credit card in Italy. Remember that although credit cards are accepted in most parts of the world, they aren't accepted everywhere. Before entering any establishment where you plan to charge your purchase, be sure that credit cards are accepted.

ATM and Credit Card Holders: Inform your bank and card company before departure that you will be spending time abroad. If you do not travel abroad frequently, a bank may occasionally freeze your card if they see purchases that they consider to be out of the ordinary. Forewarn them.

Also, if you have a combined checking and savings account, you should place your money in the checking account. Students typically find they cannot access their savings account once outside of the U.S.

Cash: Do not bring U.S. dollars. They will not be accepted at any stores, and if stolen, they cannot be replaced. Additionally, there are no safe deposit boxes in the apartments, and the school cannot keep money for you.

Be aware of restrictions, transaction fees and service charges on the above.

Receiving Money from the U.S.

Wire transfers should only be used as a last resort; they vary in effectiveness and you often need to have a bank account in your host country in order to receive the wire.

Personal checks drawn on U.S. bank accounts are **not** accepted abroad.

Emergency Money Transfers

If you need to have money sent to you from the U.S. while studying abroad the best service to use is Western Union's **MONEY IN MINUTES**. By contacting Western Union you can send money from the U.S. to any Western Union Office worldwide using a U.S. debit or credit card.

You can use this service online at www.westernunion.com and click on **MONEY IN MINUTES**. You can also send money over the phone by calling 1-800-CALL-CASH or by visiting any Western Union office.

For more information on this service and transferring money abroad, please visit www.westernunion.com.

Western Union pick-up locations are found throughout Florence and at any exchange office displaying the Western Union logo.

Handling Foreign Currency

- Go to major local banks or to national banks in cities to exchange currency rather than to small banks or money brokers. Bureaux de Change give good rates as well.
- Buy a small amount of foreign currency (100 Euros) before departure to have handy upon arrival for taxis, buses and tips. Buy more if you will arrive on a weekend.
- Do not keep a lot of local currency when you depart a country. Exchange it at a bank or at a departure terminal. It may not be easy to exchange foreign currency when you return home, and typically only bills may be exchanged, not coins.
- Don't over-tip. Italians tend to tip less than we do in the U.S. Service may be included so leaving a few coins as a gesture of thanks is appropriate, but there is no need to leave 15-20% of the bill.
- Never exchange your money in hotels, restaurants, bars or shops. They can and will charge high commissions and are not obligated to charge the daily exchange rate.

- Never carry large sums of cash with you. If it is lost or stolen, there is no way to replace it, and it is not covered by insurance.

BUDGETING AND SPENDING MONEY

Temptations for spending money in Florence (cafés, pastry shops, shopping, museums) are overwhelming, and you should keep this in mind, particularly at the beginning of the program. After a while you will become accustomed to life in Florence and will more easily regulate your expenses. You will need to plan carefully. The AIFS social calendar will provide a range of subsidized activities for your enjoyment.

AIFS recommends students budget \$600-700 per month for the basic extras and day-to-day needs. This will not cover extensive personal travel and expensive gift buying. It is advisable to have a credit card in case of unexpected costs.

You know better than anyone else what your spending habits are. Take some time to think about your daily expenses. Ask yourself some of these questions:

Are you used to buying soda out of a machine? Soda machines are scarce in Europe, but sodas are readily available in newsstands on almost every corner (with exchange rates, plan about \$1.60-3.30 each).

Will you write many letters? Include the cost of postage and stationary. Postcards are very convenient. Use lightweight stationary whenever you can.

Sample menu in Florence:

	<u>Euro (€)</u>
Soup/pasta or rice dish	8
Meat	12
Vegetable	5
Beer	5
Cocktails	7/8
Ice cream or cake	4
Coffee	2
<hr/>	
Total	43/44
Cover charge	€2
10% service charge	

Sample Expenses

Pub	Beer - €5, Cocktails - €5
Night Club entrance charge	€12
Can of soda	€1.50
Hot chocolate or tea in a tearoom or café	€2
Bottled water	€1.50 per liter
Laundry	€7 per small load

When budgeting, remember to include weekend trips outside the city, any additional cultural and social activities you might want to pursue that are not offered as part of your program, and additional excursions offered at a non-subsidized rate.

Don't forget the mid-term break, if your program has one. Plan for trips and excursions.

Plan your budget carefully and stick to it. As a rule, it's better to bring too much money and not spend it all than not to have enough and miss opportunities.

How can I calculate the total cost for the program?

The program can be divided into four cost areas: AIFS program fee, flight cost, home institution's tuition fee and spending money.

BAGGAGE TIPS

It is important to use luggage that is durable, easy to pack and easy to carry. Check the handles and seams to make sure they are secure. Soft luggage with zippered openings is lighter and easier to pack than a hard case. You will find backpacks useful to bring for weekend trips. They are easy to carry and many convert into suitcases.

CHECK YOUR AIRLINE'S WEBSITE CLOSE TO DEPARTURE AS INFORMATION IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING.

Do not lock your luggage, even your checked bags. Airport security personnel will remove locks from any bags that require inspection.

Here are some additional tips:

Pack only what you can carry. Bring half of what you think you'll need. Porters are scarce abroad and luggage carts are prohibited in some parts of the airport, so do not rely on them for assistance. Do not rely on family or friends either — they will not be with you when you arrive at your overseas destination. You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage throughout your journey, until you return home, even if you are on the AIFS flight. You will also have to carry your bags some distance in Florence to get to your accommodations, as the buses and taxis might not be able to fit down the streets. **Expect many stairs within the accommodations, and know that the AIFS staff will not be able to assist with carrying.**

Pack categorically. Put clothes, toiletries, maps and guidebooks into separate compartments so that you can find them easily. Take along copies of all medical prescriptions, including eyeglasses and/or contact lenses, in case you need a refill.

Be careful what you pack in your carry-on. Any liquids packed in your carry-on must measure 3 oz. or less per container, and all such containers must fit in a quart-sized zip-top clear plastic bag that you will remove when going through security. This bag will be screened separately, apart from your luggage, so be sure it is easily accessible. For the most updated information on packing, as well as airport security, check <http://www.tsa.gov>.

Identify your luggage. Each piece of luggage, including your carry-on, should be identified with a tag showing your name and address at home and abroad. Also, put a slip of paper with your name and home address inside your luggage in case your outer tags come off during handling.

Always remove old, incorrect address and airline tags to avoid confusion. As an extra precaution, you may want to put a ribbon or a piece of brightly colored tape on your luggage to help you identify it easily in the baggage claim area. If you will be taking the AIFS flight, be sure to use the baggage tags we send you. These make you easier to identify both to the other students on the program and to the AIFS representatives meeting you overseas.

Never leave your bags unattended at the airport. Keep an eye on your bags at all times. Airlines will not accept luggage that was not packed by its owner or that was left unguarded.

Pack a few essentials in your carry-on. Unfortunately, some students have had to start their study abroad program without their luggage. Just in case the airline should lose your luggage, pack your toothbrush, any medications you need to take, an extra set of underwear, etc., in your carry-on.

Also, if your baggage does go astray en route to your overseas campus, file a claim with the airline upon arrival, giving the school address in Florence or the hotel address if you are on the pre-program European tour. You will receive the hotel address just before departure. Inform your Program Coordinator about the claim; s/he may be able to assist you. Most airlines require that you make your lost luggage claim within four hours after arrival and before you leave the airport.

Be sure that your luggage and its contents are insured against theft or loss. Personal effects insurance coverage is not included in the AIFS program fee but can be purchased for a supplemental fee. This will give you partial coverage, but please note that there are exclusions and per-item limits. Plan to leave expensive or irreplaceable items at home. Refer to the AIFS Insurance Brochure for coverage details.

Alternatively you may wish to arrange your own insurance or extend your existing insurance, especially if you do plan on bringing more expensive items like digital cameras, laptops, etc. Bring receipts for these items with you to Italy. If you do need to file a claim, you will need to show proof of purchase and purchase price.

Only students who purchased the AIFS Personal Effects Insurance Coverage have personal effects insurance coverage and may use the *Personal Effects Claim Form*.

Transatlantic Baggage Regulations

Airlines flying between the United States and Europe will expect you to follow their regulations concerning baggage allowance. Please study the specifications below, and abide by them, but know that your particular airline's regulations may differ. The less you bring, the happier you will be, and the less you will be charged for baggage fees.

International, economy-class baggage restrictions follow. These are general guidelines and may not be specific to your flight. It is always advisable to check with the airline if you have a question. You will be charged a penalty if you exceed the allowance. Please note that these are baggage regulations of the airlines and not of AIFS.

IMPORTANT: Airline regulations are changing regularly. The information below is only a guide. It is your responsibility to check with the airlines and the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) for exact requirements for the dates you will be traveling.

Checked baggage:

Most airlines allow 1 piece free of charge, but check with your specific airline to confirm their policies. Most airlines allow a second bag but may charge a fee of \$50 or more. Consider this when packing, and try to bring as little as possible. The dimensions (sum of linear measurements: L + H + W) of either piece may not exceed 62 inches. The sum of the two pieces may not exceed 107 inches. No bag may exceed 50 lbs. Don't plan to pack this much. Leave space for souvenirs, and remember you will not be able to travel around Europe after the program with that much luggage.

Carry-on baggage:

1 Piece plus a Personal Item (laptop, purse, etc.) — Must fit under seat or in overhead compartment. Carry-on luggage may not exceed 45 inches or weigh more than 13 lbs.

Note: While traveling within Europe you will be held to a 44 lb/20 kg limit for baggage. Some budget airlines allow even less at 30 lbs/15 kg.

At the airport it is your responsibility to see that your bags get checked through properly. Make sure your claim stubs have the correct destination on them, and keep them until you have collected your luggage. **These stubs are your receipts.** Airlines will refuse luggage that is improperly tagged.

Put your name and the address of your overseas destination on your baggage tags in case your bags go astray and have to be forwarded to you:

**AIFS presso CLIDA
Piazza della Repubblica, 5
50123
Florence
Italy**

European Baggage Regulations

When flying between countries within Europe (e.g., between Rome and Paris), baggage allowances are extremely restrictive. This will affect anyone who intends to travel before or after an AIFS study abroad program. We advise you to store any excess, bulky luggage items at the storage facilities located at airports and train stations throughout Europe.

Many budget airlines operate in Europe offering no-frills flights at bargain rates. While most of these airlines have similar baggage allowance guidelines (as detailed below), it is always advisable to check restrictions with individual airlines before you travel. You will be charged a penalty if you exceed these allowances. Again, please note that these are baggage regulations are enforced by the airlines and not by AIFS.

Checked baggage:

Most intra-European flights allow a maximum weight of 20 kg (44 lbs) for any one item of checked baggage and usually allow only one bag per person. Generally, checking heavier bags involves a fee of approximately \$9 per kg.

Carry-on baggage:

Each passenger can carry one small piece of hand baggage on board. The carry-on bag must not weigh more than 5 kg (11 lbs), and must measure less than 22" by 17.7" by 9.8" in dimension. You must be able to stow it securely on board.

WHAT TO PACK

Deciding what to bring and what to leave behind is a difficult task. Students always find that they bring more clothing than is necessary. Bring as little as you possibly can and try not to bring more than you yourself can carry easily, especially if you plan to travel on your own during or after the program. Closet space in rooms is limited. Remember to leave room for souvenirs and gifts to take back home.

The clothes students wear in Europe are generally the same as those found in the U.S., however Florentines do dress quite smartly. Clothing with easy care instructions is advisable as dry cleaners are very expensive. You should have a warm coat, boots, gloves and scarf, along with a raincoat, sweaters and comfortable, sturdy shoes. You will probably wear jeans most of the time, but Florentines are careful dressers, and you will probably feel more comfortable at a social or cultural event if you have a few nice outfits. White running shoes are not very Italian!

Here is a list of clothing and practical items you may want to consider packing. Also listed are clothing and items you should not bring.

Clothing**Do bring:**

- Clothing that can be worn in a range of different temperatures and without frequent washings. "Mix and match" items like jeans, T-shirts (long- and short-sleeved), sweatshirts, turtlenecks, sweaters, button-down shirts, etc., can be worn in layers when it is cold and alone when it is warmer.
- Plenty of socks and underwear
- Comfortable walking shoes — waterproof them to extend their wear
- Flip-flops (for the hallways and bathrooms)
- Mid-weight coat with a removable lining
- Raincoat and umbrella, and windbreaker or anorak with a hood
- Gloves, a hat and a scarf
- Bathing suit

Do not bring:

- Too many dressy outfits. Generally, you only need to bring one pair of dress shoes and a few dressy outfits for special occasions. Also, many students take the opportunity to buy clothes in Florence so they can blend in with the locals.

- Clothing with special washing instructions (i.e., "lay flat to dry" or "dry clean only")
- Clothes you *might* wear. Only bring things you are sure to use.

Practical Items

Do bring:

- Basic toiletries — shampoo, soap, moisturizing lotion, toothbrush/toothpaste, dental floss, shaving cream, personal hygiene products, deodorant, comb, brush, tissues, lip balm, etc. (Although you will find comparable products, you may not find your favorite brands.) Do not waste valuable luggage space with huge economy containers of shampoo, etc., unless it is imperative that you have a specific brand. Italians do wash, too!
- Battery alarm clock
- Your favorite cosmetics, perfume or cologne — they may not be easy to find abroad
- A basic medical kit containing any pain relievers you typically use (these are difficult to find overseas), cold/cough medicines, Band-Aids, something to counteract an upset stomach, something for motion sickness, antibiotic cream, etc.
- Prescription medication — bring enough to get you through the program, and bring a copy of the prescription with you
- Contact lens supplies, extra eyeglasses, a copy of your eyeglass prescription
- Sunglasses
- Extra memory cards and batteries, which can be very expensive abroad
- Photos of your family and friends
- Journal and address book
- Bath towels, a hand towel and washcloths. (Some apartments may have towels, but this cannot be guaranteed in advance.)
- ATM Card, Visa Travel Money Card/Traveler's Checks and a credit card, plus photocopies of each for security and for yourself.
- Extra passport photos (all passport photos, including the four submitted with your application, must be clear head-and-shoulders shots)
- Disposable or miniature flashlight
- Camera
- iPod/MP3 Player and charger
- Laptop (but insure it as it will not be covered under the AIFS plan)
- Electrical converter and adaptor set, if you are bringing any small electrical appliances

- Passport pouch / Money belt
- Photocopy of your passport and any visas/Green Card (kept separate from your original passport—very important). Also leave a copy at home.
- This *Florence Student Handbook* to use as a reference
- A guidebook for Italy

Do not bring:

- Bed linens or a pillow — these items will be provided
- Large or heavy electrical appliances
- School supplies (other than your required textbooks). Loose-leaf paper and notebooks are not necessary since Italian brands will not fit into American binders and vice-versa. Although Italian paper and notebooks are different from what you use, they are easy enough to find.
- American stamps. They have no value outside the U.S. You will be able to buy stamps from the post office and news agents overseas.
- Irreplaceable, valuable or expensive items

DO NOT PACK YOUR PASSPORT. KEEP IT WITH YOU AT THE AIRPORT.

EUROPEAN TOURIST OFFICES

A wealth of informative and practical literature may be obtained for free from the member national tourist offices of the European Travel Commission. The tourist office brochures often include maps and information on weather, hotels, restaurants and sports.

Austrian National Tourist Office

www.austria.info

Belgian National Tourist Office

www.visitbelgium.com

British Tourist Authority

www.visitbritain.us

Czech Tourist Board

www.czechtourism.com

French Government Tourist Office

www.us.franceguide.com

German National Tourist Office

www.germany-tourism.de

Greek National Tourist Office

www.visitgreece.gr

Irish Tourist Board

www.tourismireland.com

Italian Government Travel Office

www.italiantourism.com

Board of Tourism, Netherlands

www.holland.com

Tourist Office of Spain

www.okspain.org

Switzerland Tourism

www.myswitzerland.com

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)

Acquiring an ISIC is advisable. The discounts to which it entitles you are numerous — museum admission, theater tickets, local transportation, movie tickets, etc. If you get into the habit of asking,

you will be surprised by the number of reductions that are available. To obtain the card, check with your home school's travel or study abroad office first. If student travel services are not offered on your campus, you can call **1-800-2COUNCIL** for information, or visit their website at www.isic.org.

PERSONAL SAFETY ABROAD

Foreigners need to take certain safety precautions abroad. Here are some points to remember:

Blend in. It is not a good idea to stand out or attract undue attention to yourself. Giving the appearance of being a local student will help you to integrate into the host culture. Leave your school sweatshirts, baseball caps and any decidedly American clothing at home. If you want to blend in more, you may want to reconsider how you dress.

Women will ultimately face more safety concerns abroad. Dressing conservatively is advised. In some areas, you may be harassed by unwanted male followers, pinched or even grabbed. Ignore this behavior. If they continue to bother you, walk away. Giving them the attention they seek only encourages their behavior. Be reasonably cautious without being so paranoid that you avoid all locals, male or female. Observe the strategy of local women for fending off unwanted attention. It also helps to use common sense: do not go out alone at night and if you have to, be sure to stay on well-lit, main streets. Florence is generally safe, but this is no reason to abandon common sense.

Be aware of different cultural behavior. What is customary in the U.S. may send the wrong signals in another country. Think about your behavior and be attentive to how the locals behave in your new culture.

Also be tolerant of the ways of Florentines and Italians in general. Things you would not tolerate at home may be acceptable in Italy. It is not your place to try and change the traditions and culture of a nation.

Drink wisely. Good judgment should prevail in all circumstances where alcohol will be available. The attitudes towards liquor are different in Italy than in the U.S.; wine or beer is often consumed with the evening meal. If you are going to drink, only do so with trusted friends, and be sure at least one friend remains sober.

Be careful with your belongings. Carry a money belt or neck pouch securely inside your clothing, and be aware of your surroundings. Pickpockets are numerous in busy cities. They are most often found in front of hotels and near flea markets, train stations and food markets. Do not carry large sums of cash or credit cards. Bags or purses should be strapped across both neck and shoulder. Never leave them hanging on the backs of chairs in public places. Instead, keep them on the floor between your feet. Men should carry their wallets in their front pockets. Never tell strangers where you are staying, what your travel plans are, etc.

Be careful of where and how you buy. It is easy to become distracted while making a purchase and get cheated. Be sure that the goods you buy are the ones you actually get. A deal that seems too good to be true probably is. Do not exhibit all of your cash during a purchase. Additionally, it is not wise to display the location of your money, passport or any other valuables. Never opt for convenience over safety, and do not allow yourself to be rushed during a purchase.

Choose vehicles wisely. Use only official taxis. Before you get into any cab, make sure that the driver is willing to take you where you want to go. It is also wise to agree on a fare beforehand to avoid any complication when you arrive at your destination. Never get into a cab that already has

a passenger. All Florence cabs have an orange taxi sign on the roof. Pay phones have cab phone numbers posted on them. You cannot flag down cabs in the street. Also, they are metered, so you know what you are paying.

Use the buddy system whenever possible. If you are out at night, stick to the main avenues and take along a friend or two. Stay away from parks after sunset. If you must go out alone after dark, make sure you tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.

If you plan to jog, do not do so after dark. Be careful of local drivers who may not be used to people running along the road.

If you ever feel you are in a dangerous situation, head for the nearest hotel or restaurant and ask for help.

DRUG ARREST

Almost half the Americans jailed abroad are arrested on drug charges. Despite repeated warnings, drug arrests and convictions are still on the increase. If you are caught with either soft or hard drugs overseas, you are subject to local, not U.S., laws. Penalties for possession or trafficking are often the same. If arrested, you will find that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Most countries will not accept bail.
- Pretrial detention, often solitary confinement, may last months.
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts such as beds, toilets and washbasins.
- Diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives or friends.
- Officials may not speak English.
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading and inhumane treatment and extortion are all possible.

If convicted, you may face a sentence of:

- two to 10 years in most countries;
- a minimum of six years hard labor and a stiff fine in some countries;
- death in countries such as Turkey, Algeria and Iran.

Do not get involved with illegal drugs overseas.

Students should be aware that AIFS takes an extremely serious view of drug use on the program. Action in such cases, no matter how small the amount in the student's possession, will involve instant dismissal from the program, and the student's home school will be informed. Such disciplinary action will be initiated for any student involved in drug use.

It is essential that Italian laws regarding drug use be understood fully. Possession of any drugs, including marijuana, is punishable by law, and the penalties are severe. Foreigners are liable to be treated more severely than locals. Overseas visitors convicted of drug-related offenses face enormous fines and deportation from the country. Convictions are frequent for possession of drugs. It is particularly dangerous to purchase from dealers or at clubs, as these people are often police informers. You could be followed home and arrested after purchasing drugs, or your building could be raided by the police after a tip-off.

Smuggling drugs into Italy from abroad is illegal. There is an extremely high chance of being discovered, and penalties are very severe, including possible imprisonment.

LEGAL AID

If you have difficulties with the local authorities abroad, remember that you are subject to local laws. Unfortunately, the assistance that American officials can offer is limited by foreign laws, by U.S. laws, and by geography. The U.S. government has no funds for your legal fees and other related expenses.

You should consult a consular officer if you find yourself in a dispute that could lead to legal or police action. Although U.S. consular officers cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find adequate legal representation. It should be noted that the consular attorneys' lists, although carefully prepared, are compiled from local bar association lists and responses to questionnaires. Neither the Department of State nor U.S. embassies nor consulates can assume any responsibility for the caliber, competence or professional integrity of the attorney.

Consular officers will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. However, they CANNOT get you out of jail. If you are arrested, ask permission to notify the consular officer at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Under international agreement and practice, you have a right to get in touch with the American Consulate. If you are turned down, keep asking politely and persistently. If unsuccessful, try to have someone get in touch with the consulate for you.

When alerted, American officials will visit you, advise you of your rights according to local laws, and contact your family and friends if you ask them to do so. If your prison facilities are inadequate (as is often the case), consuls can transfer money, food and clothing from your family and friends to the prison authorities. They will try to get relief if you are held under inhumane or unhealthy conditions or treated less favorably than others in the same situation.

AIFS Disciplinary Action

Important rules:

- Quiet hours are 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
- No overnight guests are allowed.
- Excessive alcohol abuse will not be tolerated.
- Involvement with drugs will not be tolerated.
- Violent or verbally abusive behavior towards staff or students will not be tolerated.

AIFS has a written warning system. For persistent abuse of the rules, a student will receive a written warning. Upon receipt of the third warning, the student will be obligated to leave the program, forfeiting the right to a refund and returning home at his/her own expense.

Involvement with illegal drugs and any other illegal activity will lead to immediate dismissal.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is a general term used to describe the feelings of anxiety, frustration, fear or loneliness which people often experience when leaving a familiar socio-cultural environment and moving into a new one. It varies in degree from one individual to another. It occurs in young and old alike, and it can happen within one's own country (for example, a move from Iowa to New York City).

Florence will not have the family, friends and familiar places to which you are accustomed. You will be leaving a climate, geography, eating habits and social behavior you understand well. All of these things will be different in Italy and this will almost inevitably result in some degree of culture shock.

It is not uncommon to have problems adapting to a new culture — different food, the strain of speaking a foreign language, etc. Most people start to experience culture shock after several weeks. The symptoms vary from person to person. Some people find they suddenly become short-tempered and annoyed with certain behavior that characterizes the new culture. Others feel tired and lose their enthusiasm to experience new things. They want familiar, comfortable surroundings and habits. Some become depressed and miss very specific people or things from home. Students feel somewhat overwhelmed by the newness of it all during this stage. It is important to remember that this is a stage, and that it does go away.

Symptoms can also include fatigue, homesickness, sleeping long hours, preferring to be alone instead of with people, boredom and irritability. You may notice others going through this before you realize that you feel it yourself. Talk about culture shock with your friends, roommates or classmates and compare your feelings and impressions. This helps you understand and adjust to cultural differences more quickly. If you experience any of these symptoms, try to control the situation by taking positive steps. Sometimes it is helpful just to know that these feelings are normal, but it also requires effort on your part to turn the situation around. Feel free to talk to the AIFS staff. They are experienced in dealing with the symptoms of culture shock and may be able to offer some useful advice.

During the culture shock stage you need to find ways to take care of yourself and the feelings you are experiencing. Past study abroad participants recommend the following:

- Write home instead of calling. Contact old friends, professors and family in the U.S. Ask your family to send clippings from your local newspaper. This will help you feel connected to people at home.
- Keep a journal tracking your journey from start to finish.
- Try to identify particular things you miss. Decide whether they are things for which you can find similar replacements in the new culture or whether they are unique to home. Whenever possible, try to find and enjoy the replacement.
- Do not cut yourself off from people in your host culture. It makes it harder to adjust if you isolate yourself or spend time only with Americans. Try to involve yourself with new friends, teachers and activities. Remind yourself of what is interesting and rewarding about these people and events. Do not focus on the differences between them and the U.S.
- Establish a routine as quickly as possible. Plan your study hours and the days you'll spend exploring and visiting the city. Your term abroad will pass quickly, and there's a lot to do.

- Do not have overly high expectations for yourself. Do not expect to be speaking fluent Italian and having many Italian friends in the first few weeks. Realistic expectations of yourself and Florence will ease your adjustment.

Students generally pass through a number of phases while working to adapt to a new culture:

- **Initial Excitement:** At first, everything is new and exciting. This phase can last anywhere from one week to two months depending on the person. It is characterized by a sense of enthusiasm for the new culture and the feeling that it is not all so different and difficult.
- **Adjustment:** After a while, you will adapt and get used to your new surroundings. You will be able to communicate better in the language. The most frustrating part of the adjustment process has ended. It no longer seems exhausting to get through each day struggling with the language and new customs.
- **Unresolved problems:** Everyone reaches a point of frustration with adjustment. You may feel overwhelmed and wish to return home. **Do not hesitate to see the AIFS staff.** They are more than willing to listen, help and offer advice. Never feel that you are the only student to experience these emotions.
- **Acclimation/Integration:** Things begin to improve, and you feel that you belong. For visiting students, this acclimation is a merging of both your old culture and the new culture. You have not lost American values or habits, but you have integrated them with new customs.
- **Departure Concern:** You begin to feel apprehensive about returning home and readapting to your culture. You have changed as a person and have mixed feelings about going home. You will begin to wonder whether your family and friends can understand the tremendous growth you have experienced. Will you be able to reconnect? These concerns are very real and you will find you have them even after you return to the U.S. There is even something called “reverse culture shock,” which is the adjustment to reassimilate when you return home.

Big City Life

If you are not accustomed to living in big cities, Florence may well be intimidating, confusing and frustrating at first. Try not to get overtired at the beginning, and if you are used to the countryside, plan occasional weekends outside the city. The AIFS Program Coordinator will be able to help provide suggestions for such outings.

ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS

Here are some tips and suggestions that will make your term abroad run more smoothly:

- Pack light! You may get sick of wearing the same outfit, but you'll thank yourself when it's time to pack up and go home.
- You will shop, so don't overpack. Many people ended up leaving clothes and souvenirs behind because they couldn't fit them in their suitcases.
- Casual clothes are of greater necessity than dress clothes.
- Don't pack your suitcase completely full because you will bring home a lot more than you took with you.

- Overestimate the amount of money you will need.
- Keep a journal, diary or travel log and keep notes on everything. It will help record memories and identify photos later on.
- Bring photos of family, friends, etc.
- Mail is extremely important. Be sure to write to people. A letter is more valuable than an e-mail.
- Bring a guidebook; it will be indispensable.
- Read about all the places you are going to visit. Get maps for each place, and mark 10 to 15 things you want to see or do in each place.
- Travel as much as you can, but don't move around so much that you don't get a feel for each country.
- Florence is a great starting point for many European journeys, but don't fly off every weekend and forget to see Florence itself and the surrounding area.
- Bring comfortable, sturdy shoes for walking/hiking and break them in before you leave the U.S.
- Keep in mind that some places, like cathedrals, will not admit you sleeveless, in shorts, in baseball caps or in a backless or halter top. Be considerate of these requirements.
- Ask locals and experienced travelers for recommendations on places to go and things to see, from sites to restaurants, bars and clubs.
- Know your overseas address in case you get lost. Do not write your address on your keys.
- Bring an extra copy of your birth certificate, two additional passport photos and a photocopy of your passport, just in case the original is lost or stolen. Keep your passport and money in a safe place at all times.
- Send a photocopy of the information page of your passport (the page with your picture) to the AIFS Stamford, CT, office, and bring one with you to Florence.
- Purses and bags should have shoulder straps and zippers to deter pickpockets.
- Bring extra memory cards and batteries — they are *very* expensive in Europe.
- Know that you won't find all the luxuries of home, but you will find the necessities.
- Don't expect to find water fountains, and don't expect to get ice in your drinks.
- Think of every new food as a new dining experience.
- Bring an iPod/MP3 Player and charger. This is a necessity for those long, overnight bus rides.
- Budget your money! You can't afford to spend it all in one place, so plan ahead. Major cities cost more than the countryside.

- Write down everything you buy and its price. Keep all receipts and purchase agreements so that you'll have an accurate record when you go through customs. Be honest when you go through customs upon your return home. Fines are heavy.
- Don't carry too much cash with you at one time, as if it gets stolen, it can be difficult to prove and replace.
- Bring a roll of toilet paper or mini pack of tissues when you travel around to other regions.
- Always be aware of the time differences when telephoning the United States from abroad.
- Most importantly, go with an open mind and expect differences.

IN FLORENCE

THE CITY OF FLORENCE

Florence is the sixth largest city in Italy with a population of approximately 500,000. It has both the advantages and disadvantages of a city: traffic, noise and confusion, but also a rich cultural life, museums, markets, elegant shops, restaurants, and good public transportation.

Florence has been one of the most important cities in Italy for centuries and was even the country's capital for a time. When the political capital was established definitively in Rome, Florence continued to be the cultural capital. Florentines have a high opinion of themselves and their city and try to impart this opinion to visitors. You should expect to find the Florentines an elegant, reserved, highly intelligent and sophisticated society of people. They will do their best — and will even consider it a point of pride — to make your stay in Florence as pleasant and educational as possible. They will also expect you to live up to their own high standards. It can be hard to do, but the rewards will be great.

GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO YOUR RESIDENCE

Students selecting the AIFS flight will be met at the airport in Italy by a member of the AIFS staff. This person will greet you just outside the customs area and will transfer you to your accommodations.

Legally, AIFS staff is not allowed to proceed to the gate or into the customs area. If you have any problems before meeting the AIFS representative (i.e., lost luggage), see the appropriate airport staff, but also ask a fellow AIFS student (AIFS students will have similar luggage tags) to inform the AIFS representative of your situation.

Students who make their own transportation arrangements are responsible for making their own way to their residence. You should plan on flying into Pisa or Florence.

- From Pisa Airport to Florence: You can take either a train or a bus. A few trains go directly to Florence's main train station, Santa Maria Novella train station, but you most likely will have to change at Pisa Centrale. It costs approximately €5.7 (\$8) and will take approximately an hour and a half. Terravision bus service from Pisa airport to Florence is €10 (\$14) one way and €16 (\$22.50) round-trip. Bus tickets must be bought at the "Terravision" ticket counter. The bus journey will take approximately one hour. Students arriving later in the evening into Pisa will want to take the bus as it runs much later than the train.
- From Florence Airport: There is a bus from the airport to the main train station, Santa Maria Novella. It costs €5 (\$7) one way and will take approximately 15-30 minutes. From the train station, you will need to take a taxi to the accommodation. Alternatively, you may take a taxi from the airport to for around €25 (\$35), depending on how much luggage you have. The taxi rank is right outside the airport. Do not tip the taxi driver.

Transit within Florence

Florence is connected by a bus system. Tickets can be purchased at any tobacconist shop displaying an orange "A.T.A.F." sign or at the A.T.A.F. office in Florence. Students may purchase single tickets, multiples of eight, or a monthly pass.

You may enter the bus only from the front or back doors and may disembark from only the middle door. When you board the bus, validate your ticket at the box located at the back or front of the bus. Failure to validate the ticket may result in a hefty fine.

When you first arrive in Florence, a taxi will be the best way to get yourself to the Study Center with your luggage. Taxis are plentiful at the station and Florence airport and are metered.

ORIENTATION

When you arrive in Florence, you will be directed to your housing and given information about the facilities available to you while in Florence. An orientation program has been designed to help you settle in and acclimate to your new environment as quickly and painlessly as possible.

It will not be possible to have an orientation meeting the day you arrive. In addition to time constraints, you will be very tired. Instead, you will receive a welcome packet that will give you enough information to see you through to orientation the next morning. **Read it!!**

- During your orientation meeting, you will have the opportunity to talk with faculty and will be given general information about Florence and the program's cultural and social activities. The orientation packet will include details about libraries, churches, shops, museums and restaurants, as well as a map of Florence.
- The two-hour orientation is meant to provide an introduction to the program and life in Florence. Additional workshops on more specific aspects of the program, including cultural differences, travel, etc., will be held during the days following the orientation.

HOUSING AND MEALS

Accommodations

Students will be housed in a shared room in an apartment. In the apartment, four students normally share a two-bedroom apartment with cooking facilities. No breakfasts are provided, but students can purchase AIFS meal vouchers prior to departure.

A considerable amount of time is spent on the housing of each student and it is, therefore, essential that all housing questions on the AIFS application/enrollment form be answered honestly and fully, and that you specify any preferred roommates and any special medical conditions. If you feel you did not fully state your needs, please submit any additional information in writing to AIFS. The AIFS Program Coordinator reserves the right to change room assignments during the program. AIFS staff also reserves the right to enter students' rooms. However, every effort is made to do so in the presence of the students or with the students' permission.

Students should check in with the AIFS Program Coordinator on a regular basis and must notify him/her if they are going to be away, even if they will only be away for the night.

Please submit all housing and roommate requests in writing to AIFS at Florence@aifs.co.uk.

Roommates

Students wishing to be roommates must both indicate their preference on the AIFS program application/enrollment form. You must request each other. If you decide that you would like to room with someone after you have submitted your application/enrollment form, please notify AIFS at Florence@aifs.co.uk, and have your prospective roommate do the same. Please include your college name in any correspondence.

All rooming is single-sex unless we receive written authorization from your college's program coordinator.

Housing Rules

Successful communal living requires consideration for those around you. We would appreciate your cooperation in observing the following rules during your stay in Florence.

Apartments

- Quiet Hours. Good behavior is a must if everyone is to get along well, not only with other students, but also with the other people staying in the apartment building. Therefore, please do not play music loudly, disturb other residents when you return late at night, or gather in the hallways to talk. **Quiet hours are between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.** and should be strictly followed.
- No overnight guests are allowed. For security, legal and insurance reasons, only authorized residents may stay overnight in the rooms. If you have friends visiting you in Florence, the AIFS Program Coordinator will be able to help you find them a place to stay. By law, we register you with the police as the legal occupants of the apartment. Do not invite friends to stay.
- Never leave doors unlocked or windows open. You are responsible for the security of your own belongings and should take all necessary precautions.
- In order to allow the cleaning staff to clean your room, please keep it tidy, and do not leave items on the floor. Apartment residents will be provided with a change of linen that you will be responsible for laundering.
- A list of Laundromats and dry cleaners is available from the AIFS Program Coordinator.
- Please be aware that any damage, including charges for extra cleaning, will be charged to your damage deposit. Also, excessive use of utilities will be taken from your deposit. Do not leave heat, etc., on when you are out.

Towels

Towels are not always provided in the apartments.

Laundry facilities

There are many Laundromats in Florence. The machines are coin-operated, and a wash-and-dry will cost approximately 7 Euros for a small load and 9 Euros for a large load.

Meals

Meals typically are not included in the program fee (check your AIFS application/List of Program Components for details), but all students will have kitchens in their apartments where they can prepare their own meals. At the time of enrollment, students have the option to purchase a meal plan consisting of vouchers that can be used to purchase meals at selected restaurants in Florence. The meal vouchers will be distributed in Florence by the AIFS Program Coordinator.

COMMUNICATIONS

Students should have all mail sent to:

Name of Student
AIFS
CLIDA
Piazza della Repubblica, 5
50123
Florence
Italy

Be sure to leave this address with family and friends.

Public phone booths are gray and yellow and are located all over the city. Public phones are also found in bars displaying a round sign with a telephone in the center. Overseas calls can be made from all of these phones.

You are advised to purchase pre-paid calling cards once you are in Florence instead of from the U.S. There is a huge choice of cards available in Florence, and they can be used with pay phones or with cell phones. AIFS staff will explain how they work upon arrival. If you have been given a pre-paid card in the U.S. prior to departure, feel free to use it until the credit has run out, but do not top it up from Florence. A locally bought card will be much more economical.

Many students purchase **cell phones** when in Florence. They can cost \$80 to \$100 for a basic model and are "pay as you go." This means that instead of receiving a huge bill at the end of the program, you buy credit for the phone in advance and add more as necessary. Although it is quite expensive to make calls, especially international ones, it is free for you to receive them. This makes the phones ideal for family or friends who want to reach you. If you plan on making calls, you should plan on having a calling card. AIFS staff will have information about where to buy the phones and up-to-date prices when you arrive in Florence.

If a relative or guardian needs to reach you in case of an emergency, s/he should call the AIFS Florence Emergency Number: 011 39 340 836 5089. If you are in Europe and need to reach this line, dial 00 39 340 836 5089.

ACADEMIC LIFE

Classes are normally held at the AIFS study center Monday through Thursday, between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., although some Friday classes are possible, and some classes may run into the evening.

There will be an academic orientation at the start of the program that will cover classroom and course information, and any other issues related to the academic aspects of the program.

Italian Life and Culture

On a semester program, this course typically has eight lectures by Italian academics and four supporting activities relating to some of the lecture topics. Topics may include: the history of Florence, Italian politics, the Mafia and organized crime, education, and Italy's role in Europe. Organized field trips have included visits to the Uffizi, the Pitti Palace, and a walking tour of Dante's Florence. On quarter programs, there may be fewer lectures and visits.

Libraries

Most students find that the textbooks they bring from the U.S., along with materials given out by faculty, provide them with enough study material.

However, for studying we recommend that you use the Italian libraries. This will also help you integrate into Italian student life. Generally Italian libraries have only Italian books and you will not have borrowing rights, but they are excellent places to study. Italian libraries are not open after 7:00 p.m., and do not open on Sundays.

If you find that you do need to use a library, you can join the British Institute Library in Lungarno Guicciardi 9. Further details will be available on arrival from the AIFS Program Coordinator.

Textbooks

Arrangements for obtaining course textbooks for the Florence program's courses vary according to the program. Check with your campus coordinator who can provide further information. Be sure to bring your books with you, as they may be difficult to find in Florence if they have not been pre-ordered at your school's request.

COMPUTERS

Internet/E-mail Access

Limited Internet facilities are available at the school, but there is free wireless for those who bring a laptop. Remember to bring a flash drive so you can print any work you have done on your laptop.

Also remember to bring the correct converter for European electricity, and the proper plug adaptor. Finally, be sure you have insurance on your computer as the AIFS policy excludes computers and related equipment.

More and more cafés, restaurants, etc., now have free wireless access. There are no fixed phone lines in the student housing, but it is becoming quite common to find students accessing the Internet in their apartments using wireless technology. At the moment, if it is possible at all, it is entirely at the student's expense.

TRAVEL

While you are in Florence, there will be many opportunities to travel further afield into the rest of Europe.

AIFS is unable to store any excess luggage for students who plan either to arrive in Florence prior to the start of the program or stay after the end of the program.

If you are seeking accommodation in Florence before the start of the program, refer to one of the many student travel guides that list inexpensive bed and breakfasts and hotels in all parts of Florence.

Travel out of Florence

Studying and living in one particular city in Europe (while fulfilling in itself!) gives you only a limited view of European life. In order to appreciate fully the differences in culture, you will no doubt want to explore outside of Florence and visit other towns, cities and countries.

Your first port of call these days when researching travel plans should be the Internet. It is a vital resource – you can look up train times in Italy and throughout Europe, book cheap accommodations and best of all, you can find some really cheap deals on flights around Europe with the many budget airlines that have transformed airline travel for Europeans in recent years.

Budget airlines include easyJet (www.easyjet.com), Ryanair (www.ryanair.com), Veuling (www.vueling.com), transavia.com (www.transavia.com), Meridiana (www.meridiana.it) and Flybaboo (www.flybaboo.com).

Please be aware that although flights can be incredibly cheap, there are extra hidden costs, such as tax charges, airport (as opposed to online) check-in charges and baggage check-in charges. Additionally, the airport names used can be misleading. Pisa Airport is often referred to as Florence Airport, though Pisa is a totally different city and is over an hour away from Florence! Flight times also can be problematic. If the flight departs particularly early in the morning or lands particularly late at night, you must make sure there is transportation to and from the airport at those times. Otherwise, you might find that you have to spend money on a hotel near the airport, which then defeats the point of buying a cheap flight. While AIFS is not a travel agent and therefore cannot make reservations on your behalf, AIFS staff will hold travel workshops during your first week in Florence to discuss in greater detail the options available to you and give helpful hints to get you started.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE

Most medical treatment, including hospital and private consultation, has to be paid for privately, apart from certain exemptions such as visits to the emergency room.

These charges can, however, be reclaimed through the AIFS group insurance plan which covers all students on the program, subject to the conditions of the policy. Students must pay the \$50 deductible for each covered injury or illness. Detailed listings of doctors in your area are available from the AIFS Program Coordinator. The Coordinator can make appointments for you and will provide you with a *Medical Claim Form* to complete, or you may print this form from the AIFS portal (www.aifspartnerships.com). Keep all receipts from any doctor's visits or for any medications, and submit them with the claim form. Refunds can only be processed with a completed form and accompanying receipts.

Details of other medical services are also available upon request from the AIFS Program Coordinator, e.g., dentistry, family planning, homeopathy, chiropractic, etc. Be sure to note, though, that there are exemptions that are not covered by the AIFS insurance. As AIFS insurance does not cover pre-existing conditions, it is essential that students with such conditions speak to their own insurers and make arrangements to have their existing coverage extended to cover them abroad.

Counseling

Some of you may be away from home for the first time, and even if you are used to living in a dorm, adjusting to life in a new city and a different culture can be very tough at first. During the first few days it's natural to feel a little strange, disoriented and homesick, especially if also suffering from jet lag. If you feel any of these symptoms when you arrive or experience any other kind of problem during your stay in Florence, whether personal, practical or academic, do not hesitate to seek help and support from the AIFS Program Coordinator. AIFS is concerned about student welfare and can help when individual problems occur.

CLIMATE

Florence's climate is fairly mild but can get quite cold in the fall and winter. November is Florence's rainy month, and spring doesn't usually arrive until late April or early May.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
°F	50/35	53/37	58/41	65/45	74/52	81/58	87/62	86/62	79/57	69/50	58/43	50/37
°C	10/2	12/3	15/5	19/8	23/11	27/15	31/17	30/17	26/14	21/10	15/6	10/3

ELECTRICITY

Electrical current varies throughout the world. Appliances designed to operate on U.S. electricity (110/120 volts) will not operate overseas where the electrical power is twice that found in the U.S. (220/240 volts).

Purchase an electrical converter and adaptor set before you depart the U.S. This will protect any electrical appliances you bring with you and will allow you to operate them on European voltage. Better yet, bring as few electrical appliances as possible. Wait until you are in Florence, and share the cost of buying a cheap hairdryer or speakers (for laptop and MP3s) among your roommates. It also cuts down on what you have to carry.

Utilities in Italy are very expensive. Consequently, Italians are very conscious of lights left on when no one is in the room, wasted hot water and unnecessary phone calls. During the winter, hot water is regulated by central heating, which by Italian law can only be kept on for a limited amount of time per day. Be prepared to wear warm clothes most of the time, indoors as well as outdoors. Central heating in Italy is not as efficient as in the U.S., and you will need to learn to adapt. Italian homes are made to be cool in hot weather but not necessarily warm in the winter.

Please keep this in mind for your own apartments. Excessive use of utilities may mean that you have to pay something yourselves if it is above what AIFS considers to be "normal usage."

SPORTS

Facilities in Florence are limited. There are a few tennis courts available for a fee, and a covered swimming pool is open all winter. Many students jog along the Arno River or in the wooded park, the Cascine. It is also possible to go horseback riding. Many students find the walking they do and vast amount of steps in Florence give them plenty of exercise. Others prefer a bicycle, the perfect mode of transportation for Florence, once you get used to the traffic.

AIFS will not assist students in the hiring or purchase of motorbikes and mopeds and strongly recommends that students do not look into them themselves.

Q & A

Will there be field trips?

Yes! The cost of these trips has been partially subsidized in your AIFS fees and thus is inexpensive. Throughout the program, regular weekly events will take place that cost little or are free. You will be very busy. Examples include soccer matches, wine tasting, cooking classes and concerts. In addition, there may be weekend trips offered. Details will be given upon arrival.

Can I work while in Florence?

No, not to earn money. Work permits are difficult to obtain.

Must I fly with AIFS?

No. However, if you purchase the AIFS Transportation Package and fly on the standard program departure and return dates, you will receive the transfer from the airport to your residence as part of the package. There are no direct transatlantic flights to Florence; there will be a change of planes at some point during your journey. If you make your own flight arrangements, you are responsible for arranging your own transfers, and for any costs involved.

If you will be providing your own transportation, be sure to complete and send back to the AIFS Connecticut office the *Travel Information Form* available on the AIFS portal.

Can I change my return flight?

Maybe. For a fee and subject to airline approval and availability, you may try to change your return flight date only. This must be done directly with the agent once you are abroad. The AIFS staff in Florence will advise on the procedure. Only date changes are allowed; there can be no changes to the routing, and there will be an airline-imposed fee that could be as high as \$200-250. Additionally, if you have a connecting flight in the U.S., you must check whether you are able to change that U.S. domestic flight, since some cannot be changed.

How long after the program ends will my damage deposit be refunded?

AIFS will process your damage deposit refund approximately eight to 10 weeks after the end of your program. It will be mailed to the address we had on file for you prior to your departure. Be sure to send us your new address if your old address is no longer valid. There is a check re-issuance fee of \$25, so be sure to deposit your check quickly, and to let us know if you haven't received it.

Do I get a refund if I change my mind and decide not to go on the program?

Carefully read the AIFS refund policy on the *Agreement and Release Form*. When you sign your application, you sign a statement indicating your understanding of the refund policy and your compliance with it.

How much luggage can I bring?

Airlines have size limits and they impose a high surcharge for excess weight. Read the information in this handbook, and contact the airline directly for the latest regulations.