



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

Switzerland: Global Health and Development Policy
Summer 2023

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, information is subject to change based on shifting conditions in the US and Switzerland.

Switzerland lies in the heart of Western Europe. It is a small (41,285 square kilometers) country, but with its mountains, hills, rivers, and lakes, it boasts a diverse landscape from west to east. It's a federal republic with a semi-direct democracy and three political levels: the central government, the 26 cantons, and about 2,700 communes. The modern Swiss Confederation was established in 1848. Switzerland has a high population density, is divided between four different language regions, and reflects a number of cultures. Over seven million people live in Switzerland. Of these, 20% are foreigners.

Switzerland's most important "natural resource" is education. Otherwise, the country has no raw materials to speak of. Its economy is based on the development and production of high-quality goods. The standard of living in Switzerland is high. Its neutrality, development, cooperation, and humanitarianism form the foundations of its foreign policy. The Swiss have strong political and economic ties with the rest of the world, and Switzerland is a member of various international organizations. They also signed bilateral agreements with the European Union on various issues.

Geneva, Switzerland:
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JUN JUL
72/52 75/54

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

During your stay in Switzerland, The weather during your program could be fairly cool and damp, so make sure to bring warm, waterproof clothing. Keep in mind that it is much cooler in the higher altitudes,

but in general you will need typical summer clothing such as shorts, sandals, etc.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Although Geneva is an international place, the professional and social relationships between individuals are relatively formal. It is not considered polite to call immediate superiors or teachers by their first name unless being invited to do so. For example, when addressing professors or lecturers, as well as SIT staff members, students are expected to use the titles Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Men and women greet each other by shaking hands in both business and professional settings.

When sitting in a classroom, resting area, or during dinner with homestay family, the student should sit squared and avoid negligent manners. Although laptops are allowed in classrooms, the use of mobile phones is strictly forbidden. Homestay families might be conservative with computer usage.

DIET

Special Diets:

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible, but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Generally people in Switzerland eat three times a day. In the morning between 7:00AM and 8:30AM is breakfast time, a midday meal takes place between 12:00PM and 2:00PM, and the evening meal usually takes place between 7:00PM and 8:30PM. In the cities, all kinds of food can be found, however the homestay family cannot always provide for particular diets.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.



SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

Based on evolving conditions of the pandemic including higher vaccination rates, increased protection with many individuals from previous infections, lower rates of serious illness associated

with positive cases, and the removal of vaccine mandates in most SIT locations, SIT no longer requires vaccination to participate on programs except for locations where host country governments require it.

However, we strongly encourage students to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 per [CDC recommendations](#). SIT continues to closely monitor COVID-19 conditions in each program location and will advise students on any location-specific COVID-19 requirements and regulations prior to and during their program.

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and medical insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

Switzerland is a relatively safe country with a rather low level of violence and insecurity. However, students must observe caution as they would in any big city, particularly in the evening hours. During the entire duration of the program and especially during academic excursions, students need to avoid walking alone at night.

Passports, credit cards, money, and other valuable items should be carried in a safety belt or pocket under your clothing, and you should make copies of important documents and store them separately. We strongly recommend that you bring a travel belt/safety belt.

Follow the advice of locals (in particular your host family)—e.g. if people in the area do not go jogging and tell you not to, listen to them and don't do it.

Although all healthcare services are available in Geneva and Nyon, we suggest that you have a complete health checkup as well as a dental checkup and any subsequent work prior to leaving the US.

HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

You will be living with a Swiss or international family outside of Geneva in a small city, town, or village for the duration of the semester. Most of these communities are northeast of Geneva near Nyon.



TRANSPORTATION

Like thousands of others who live and work in the area, you will be required to commute up to an hour daily by train and by bus. The transportation system is excellent. However, depending on where you live, you may be somewhat limited in terms of evening activities. As is always the case when living abroad, some adjustment on your part will be required.



You will be provided a local commuter rail pass that will cover all your transportation to/from your homestay and the program center for class. Any other travel outside the Geneva area will be at your own cost.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. **For that purpose students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. DO NOT purchase an international plan unless you have a dual SIM phone.** We discourage this for regular smart phones because your homestay family will not be able to communicate with you as they would have to call internationally.

During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will choose the appropriate solution for having a working smart phone during their stay in Switzerland. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

You can buy a smart phone in Switzerland for approximately CHF 150-200CHF (US \$150-200),

which can be used to contact fellow students and program staff. Visitors who wish to use a prepaid SIM card, approximately CHF 20 (US \$20), will be required to register with the service provider and produce identification and purchase credit to keep the phone functional.

Rates for international calls made from Switzerland are more expensive than if made from the US. Calls can be made using an AT&T, MCI, or other calling card. You should call your calling card company before you leave to obtain the access code you will need to use in Switzerland.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. You will have free access to email at the cyberspace of the United Nations Library, as well as at cyber cafés in Geneva for a small fee.



MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive and problematic**. Customs agents must

inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.

For this program, **DHL and FedEx services are available in country.** Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

Posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name

c/o Association of World Learning in Switzerland
Avenue Reverdil 6
1260 Nyon - VD
SUISSE

MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

The Swiss franc, denoted CHF (which stands for the Confoederatio Helvetica franc), is the official currency of Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The Swiss franc is available in banknotes, which bear the value of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, or 1000 francs.

Passports, credit cards, money, and other valuable items should be carried in a safety belt.

Switzerland has an excellent banking system. In every city, it is easy to find banks to do all kinds of transactions, including cash withdrawal, changing currencies, and traveler checks. Banks are open on

workdays between 9:00AM and 5:00PM, and some banks are also open on Saturday morning between 9:00AM and 12:00PM. It is always a good idea to bring some money in traveler's checks, in case your credit card or ATM cards are stolen or lost.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US \$1,350 to \$2,250.** To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program and specific personal expenses.

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending: (from past student suggestions)	\$500 – 1,100
Up-front medical costs: (any medical costs will get reimbursed)	\$600
COVID-19 Test(s) (costs may vary)	\$100-250
Cell phone: (depends on if you need a SIM or a phone)	\$150 – 300
Estimated total:	\$1,350 – 2,250



VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

PACKING GUIDELINES

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. Consider bringing one large rolling suitcase.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

For your stay in Switzerland, you should bring a two-to three-week supply of clothes. Europeans tend to dress more formally than Americans, particularly in Geneva. Remember that you may need clothes that are suitable to a business environment, interviews, and/or for volunteer hours.

The temperature and humidity will vary significantly; make sure to bring a variety of clothes to match with these differences.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **strongly recommended** that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. SIT does not provide personal property insurance and it is recommended that you insure your computer, smart phone, or other valuables for full coverage. For details on SIT’s insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on our [Student Insurance](#).

SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

It is highly advised to back up your laptop and or smartphone to safeguard all your data if your computer is lost or stolen.

Computers are not readily available to students on this program. Certain homestay families do have computers at their homes, although this cannot be guaranteed. As stated above, it is best to bring a laptop. You will also need to a voltage converter and a plug adapter. If you want to have constant, easy access to a computer, it is a good idea to have an extended warranty in Europe in case of repairs.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

Electrical appliances from the US will require a voltage converter and 2-prong adapter; the electrical current is 220 volts in Europe. Outlets in Switzerland use plug types C and F. You can also purchase adapter plugs and converters in Switzerland if needed.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank

your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Only bring enough shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, etc. for the first couple of weeks or so. These items are often heavy and space-consuming, and they can easily be bought in Switzerland. However, if you are interested in saving your spending money for other things, bring enough for the entire program, as everything, including toiletries, is much more expensive in Geneva.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or [Contact a Former Student](#).

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.



PACKING LIST

CLOTHING

- 1 pair neat jeans (no rips/holes)
- 4 shirts (one fairly dressy – short and long sleeve)
- 1 sweater
- Underwear (one-week supply)
- Socks (one-week supply)
- pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers (people often wear house slippers, more than in the US)
- 1 pair COMFORTABLE, everyday shoes which are fairly dressy and good for walking
- 1 pair neat sneakers
- Money belt
- 1 nice outfit - dress/skirt, shirt, and tie
- 2-3 pair pants, shorts, or skirts- casual and dressy

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- University ID (if you have one you can get discounts on entrance fees)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- 2 passport photos (in case your passport is lost or stolen)
- Proof of Covid-19 Vaccination encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Extra pair of glasses or contacts, if needed
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid (available in Switzerland, but more expensive)
- Adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills) and vitamins, if needed
- To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19 you should come prepared with an appropriate number of face masks. Some individual venues may still require masks for entrance. The CDC recommends a close-fitting and protective mask that is comfortable for daily use.

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Laptop
- Camera
- Small French-English dictionary
- School supplies to get you started during orientation: notebook, journal, pens
- Small tape recorder (for field work interviews)
- Bath towel, washcloth
- Travel alarm clock
- Fold-up umbrella
- Photos of home, school, friends, etc.
- Sports clothes
- 1 swimsuit
- Shorts (May through September)

