



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

Belgrade, Budapest, and Vienna :

Comparative European Perspectives on Conflict and Democracy

Spring 2024

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please note that information is subject to change due to shifting conditions in the U.S. and Serbia.

During the 15 weeks of the semester, you will spend most of your time in Belgrade, Serbia, with excursions to Budapest, Hungary and Vienna, Austria. A visit to Bratislava in Slovakia will also be part of the travel.

Belgrade is the largest urban space in Southeast Europe. It is a vibrant city that goes to sleep late, and is the political, cultural and economic center of Serbia. It is also home to a number of universities, and many civil society organizations.

The SIT learning center in Serbia is based at the Faculty of Media and communications (FMK), in a walking distance to the city center, close to the Sava and Danube rivers.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Each semester you will need to be prepared for both warmer and colder weather. For the colder months bring warm, waterproof clothing, including a winter coat. For the warmer months you will naturally need summer clothes. Note that with global climate change, weather is harder to predict; winters are milder and summers are much warmer, though these patterns can certainly vary.

Belgrade, Serbia:

AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
45/32	52/38	65/46	75/55
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
74/60	59/47	48/38	39/31



LOCAL CUSTOMS

During your time in the program you will learn more about the local customs and gestures in everyday interaction. There is no list of dos and don'ts; it's all about you becoming a good listener and observer.

The issues we cover in the thematic seminar, as related to questions of conflict and democracy, are still open and contested among state officials, local communities and ordinary people. You will encounter many different opinions and various explanations regarding different subjects like the wars of the breakup of Yugoslavia, why it was so violent, why Kosovo declared independence, or why Serbia refuses to recognize it, etc. As in the US people hold various opinions regarding questions of conflict and democracy in Europe. As a student on this program, you will have to learn, in addition to regional politics and history, how to listen to different arguments and narratives.

The way people discuss politics or approach each other may be different than what you are used to in the United States. People are more direct, say what is on their minds, or make eye contact on a bus or tram ride. These are small things you will explore, experience, and learn how to interact with.

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.

Food and eating are of course an important part of each culture. If at home you are particular about your eating habits, you may find food in this region adds another layer to your cross-cultural experience. Your families may cook continental style food (heavier dishes of meat, potatoes, soups, salad, or fish). The open-air market overflows with fresh vegetables and fruits at very reasonable prices. There are health food stores in the large cities we will visit.

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.

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 instance, coming prepared with face masks for personal use if individual venues/location requirements deem in necessary after arrival. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, accident and illness insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

On the surface, health, safety, and general conditions of life are similar in Belgrade to most places in Europe and the United States. For

example, tap water is of high drinking quality, and food is as safe as in the US. Of course, there are also many differences between life in Serbia and in the US, and students should be prepared to look for the differences lying under the surface and to adjust their behavior appropriately.

The program has extensive contacts with the LGBTQ communities in Belgrade. Some parts of Balkan society are relatively conservative, but there is some support offered for LGBTQ students in the



activist communities and in securing a safe, pleasant, and welcoming homestay. Students should feel free to discuss any questions or concerns with program staff.

Public transportation is safe and runs frequently in the capital cities of Belgrade, Budapest, and Vienna. Particular tips and behaviors that will help minimize students' risks when traveling around program destinations will be covered further in orientation. Homestays will let students know the safest ways to come home and at what hours. It is important that students heed the advice of their homestay family as well as program staff around this and all safety topics.

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 may vary. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single person, a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time.

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.

In Belgrade, you will move in with your host family once the orientation is completed. During the week you will have breakfast and evening meals with the family and receive an allowance for lunches. On weekends you will have all meals with your family. During the Independent month students are given a stipend for their living expenses. They may opt to continue living with their host family in Belgrade.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

During orientation you will be staying in a hostel or a small hotel in Belgrade. On excursions to Budapest and Vienna, you will be staying in hostels or small hotels. During ISP/Internship, students arrange their own housing, with possible help from local staff, depending on the location of their ISP. Students may have an opportunity to continue living in their Belgrade homestay during the ISP/Internship.

TRANSPORTATION

The most commonly used transportation in Belgrade is buses, trolley buses, and trams. Taxis are also

widely available and relatively cheap. Most of you will be commuting about **30-50 minutes a day**.

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, or (b) 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 program staff and 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 local staff, students will learn how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

Buying a local SIM card is easy and inexpensive. It will cost approximately RSD 800 (USD \$8) and adding credit can be done at many local retailers. The cost of credit for your phone monthly will vary depending on how much you use it.

The SIT learning center provides internet access during office hours. Many venues, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafés in the large cities offer free WiFi. You should bring your laptop as well as a tape recorder to record interviews for field studies and ISP. If you don't have one, you may have to buy one here, but they are less expensive in the US.

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/or 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 addressed in the to the following way:

Student Name

Student's homestay family's address
11000 Belgrade
Serbia

Students will know their homestay address by the end of the first week. Please note that students are the only ones who can disclose their homestay address to family and friends. SIT is not allowed to share this information.



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. During the ISP/Internship period, students will receive a stipend for basic room and board only, based on the cost of living at the program base. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP/Internship are the students' responsibility. Please plan accordingly.**

ATMs are easy to come by in the region. It is recommended that you have the majority of your money in a checking account in the US, and access it using a debit/ATM card. It is also advisable to bring a credit card (VISA or MasterCard) for emergencies, medical or otherwise. **AAA prepaid travel cards are not accepted anywhere in Serbia, Hungary, or Austria.** It is also good to have a small amount of cash for traveling and emergencies. **Travelers checks and personal checks are not accepted anywhere.** Previous students suggest that you look into online banking.

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 \$1,500 to \$2,500**. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP, independent travel or a specific personal expense.

The Serbian Dinar (RSD) is the currency of Serbia.

Check current exchange rates:

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

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending: (from past student suggestions)	\$1,500- 2,500
Books, printing, supplies:	\$100
Up-front medical costs: (you will get reimbursed for medical costs)	\$400
Potential ISP travel expenses:	\$250

Visa:	\$300
COVID-19 Test(s) (optional; costs may vary)	\$100-250
Estimated total:	\$2,650- 3,800

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, even during the ISP/Internship period. 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. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

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.

Former students suggested that travelling with a backpack was easier than with a suitcase. Both are doable and are up to what you find more convenient. Don't forget a book bag to use for your classes during the week; often when you will be taking day trips or city tours, a messenger bag or backpack is most efficient.

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

We will spend time in larger cities as well as smaller towns on excursions. In general, young people in this part of the world tend to follow fashion trends that are more European. That means sometimes they may be a bit dressier than US college students. North American fashion is also very influential though; casual dress, especially jeans, is most popular here as well. If this is important to you, make sure you bring the right clothes. There are a few things to keep in mind: 1) Do not bring an outfit you will only wear once. 2) Plan to dress in layers—as it gets warmer or colder, you can simply eliminate or add layers. Keep in mind that winter is cold, and

that in May and September the weather may be warmer. 3) Depending on your preference, you might want to bring some dressier everyday clothes (and not only sportswear). However, our program does not include any events that require official clothes. 4) You will be outside for long periods of time, traveling to and from class by public transportation and on many walking tours during excursions. Be sure to bring comfortable, waterproof walking shoes. 5) Every household in Belgrade has a washing machine but usually no dryers; everything is hung up to dry, so try to bring clothing that line dries quickly.



EQUIPMENT

If you are on the ISP track, you are required to use a handheld voice recorder for interviews, so bring one if you have it (or plan to use the application on your smartphone). You can find it in Belgrade, but it can be more expensive than in the US. It is also recommended that you bring a USB memory drive.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **required** 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 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.

Wireless internet is available at the program office. Students will have access to one computer available for communal use. Office hours may vary according to the program's schedule. Students are required to type all their assignments.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>. The electrical current is 220 volts in Europe.

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

In shops you can find many items. However if you have your favorite ones you don't want to give up, bring them with you.

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!



PACKING LIST

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director. The clothing you bring may be adapted to your own style, within cultural norms of acceptable dress.

CLOTHING (SUGGESTIONS)

- Underwear (one-week supply)
- Socks (one-week supply)
- 1 pair comfortable, everyday shoes that are fairly dressy and good for walking
- 1 pair sneakers
- 1 pair summer sandals
- 1 pair winter boots or wet weather shoes
- 1 pair of nicer shoes (only if you want)
- Winter hat, gloves, scarf
- 2 pairs pants/jeans
- 5-6 shirts
- 2 sweaters
- 1 cold weather coat
- House slippers (worn by members of almost all host families; you should have your own pair, note that people do not usually go barefoot at home)
- Pajamas
- Swimsuit
- Nice outfit for going out in evening

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- 2 passport photos
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccine encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- You've received the proper immunizations for Serbia/Hungary/Austria (please see the [Health Guidelines & Requirements](#) document for the details)
- Extra pair of glasses or contacts, if needed
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid, if needed
- Adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills) and vitamins, if

needed (please note: delivering medicine via mail may be problematic, and the package may be held in the customs and potentially refused postal entry; it is therefore recommended you bring enough supply with you, and maybe even more than you need, just to be on the safe side).

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Unlocked cell phone
- Travel alarm clock
- Travel umbrella
- School supplies to get you started during orientation (notebook, journal, pens, etc.)
- Workout clothes