



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

Italy: Food Security & Nutrition

Summer 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COUNTRY OVERVIEW..... 3

 General Information3

 Climate and Geography3

 Local Customs3

 Diet4

 Safety, Security, and Health.....5

 Accommodations5

 Other Accommodations.....5

 Transportation.....6

 Communication6

 Phones and E-mail.....6

 Mailings.....6

 Money7

 Visitors and Free Time8

PACKING GUIDELINES..... 9

 LUGGAGE9

 Clothing Guidelines9

 Computers and Other Electronics9

 What You Can and Cannot Obtain in Country.....9

 Alumni Contacts.....9

PACKING LIST..... 11

 GENERAL.....11

 Travel Documents.....11

 Health/Toiletries11

 Other Important Items11

 Optional 11



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Information is subject to change based on shifting conditions in the US and Italy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Montespertoli is a town about 18 miles outside of Florence in the Tuscany region of Italy. The name is pronounced “mon-teh-SPER-to-lee,” with the stress on the third of five syllables. The town has a population of about 14,000. Montespertoli sits on a road originally built thousands of years ago by the Etruscans, the Via Volterra, a road that for centuries was an important trading route among inland settlements. Thanks to Montespertoli’s location on the Via Volterra, the town served as a customs post and an important regional market, collecting tolls and selling goods to those traveling the Via Volterra.

Montespertoli is located in an agricultural region, full of rolling hills that are home to olive groves and vineyards. Wine has been produced in the area for centuries. The town of Montespertoli has a Wine Museum and hosts a Chianti Festival and a Vinsanto festival each year. The *comune* of Montespertoli has developed a broad planning tool known as “Parco Agrario,” the Agricultural Park, with the goal of ensuring that decisions related to agriculture and the use of land foster sustainable local development.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Tuscany is a hilly region crossed by rivers and mountain chains. The hill country, used for agriculture, comprises almost two thirds of its total area.

Between the months of May and October you are most likely to experience good weather with pleasant average temperatures that fall between 20 degrees Celsius (68°F) and 25 degrees Celsius (77°F). Temperatures at night in June drop to 15 (59°F) and 18 (64°F) in July.

Average rainfall is 8 days in June and 4 days in July.



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Montespertoli and the surrounding region enjoy a Mediterranean climate, with hot, sunny summers and mild, wet winters. Summer days are usually in the high 80s or low 90s (Fahrenheit), while the nights might be cooler, closer to 60 degrees. Students should always have water available, especially if working or walking outside, and wear a hat.

Montespertoli, Italy:			
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)			
JUN	JUL	AUG	
81/58	88/63	87/63	

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Italians may commonly display a strong sense of affection and camaraderie with closer physical contact than you may be used to. People, regardless of gender, tend to greet each other and say goodbye with two to three kisses on alternating cheeks starting with the left cheek. Be careful not to swoop in to the right cheek in beginning your greeting as this may cause momentary confusion! Not every interaction requires such contact – in greeting strangers, a formal handshake will do - but as soon as any confidence is built do not be surprised to move towards more physical contact.

Italians tend to hold your hand or your arm as they are greeting, and a hand on the shoulder or even back of the neck is not uncommon as conversation begins.

You may also notice a heightened sense of aesthetic awareness and sensibility, especially in the public realm, which may even seem excessive compared to your home institution. Italians tend to take great pride in dressing and presenting themselves in public and you may feel a bit underwhelming with the contents of your luggage. Do not worry, you will not be judged by your aesthetic sense but cleanliness and neatness are considered fundamental in both personal appearance and in general behavior.

Homes tend to be much smaller than you may be used to and space is at a premium, so in your residence you should make sure to keep your belongings gathered in your personal area.

DIET

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 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.

Students may be invited into an Italian home and experience home cooking. It is custom to bring a gift for the host, usually a bottle of wine, chocolates or flowers. The Mediterranean diet is ideal for vegetarians too, as there are plenty of plant based foods such as whole grains, vegetables, legumes, fruit and nuts, seeds, herbs and spices and olive oil.

All types of meat are available in raw form, cold cuts and cheeses. The gluten free availability in local supermarkets has grown in recent years due to the increase of celiac. Everything can be accommodated for and vegetarian options are always available.

Food is the bedrock of Italian culture and is at the heart of many traditions, holidays and everyday life. Italians generally eat a very light breakfast of coffee with warm milk and a light pastry. Lunch can range from a light panino to a plate of pasta to a meat and vegetables dish, generally between 1-3pm. Dinner is the main culinary but also family event and is the focal point of daily home life. The variety of foods and the depth of gastronomic tradition makes it possible to meet the needs of most diets in Italy. Be aware however that people will be very keen to share many traditional foods including cheeses, cured meats, and a range of local and regional delicacies with you, and their preparation and your enjoyment of these will be a source of pride. Meals tend to be long and larger than you may be used to, especially on weekends. You will not be forced to over-eat but be polite in declining food. You may also wish to specify that you prefer smaller portions given the variety of food you will be offered.

It is important to note is that while Italians, like most people in the Mediterranean, enjoy wine and have a custom of pairing wine with food, in Italy it is culturally unacceptable to be publicly intoxicated. Some visitors may think that because Italians drink wine so frequently, the cultural norm is to drink a lot. It is not.

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 essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends doing your own research to stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#). It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel, and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. SIT encourages students to have an informed discussion with your doctor and/or a travel clinician about what vaccines and other prophylactic medication you should receive.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health & wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country is very difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving



medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

Students should speak with their health care provider and/or a travel clinician and consult [CDC guidelines](#) regarding required and recommended immunizations and country regulations. Students participating on programs that require the yellow fever vaccine, will receive a signed and stamped "yellow card" after getting vaccinated, known as the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, which can be printed here). It is important to bring this card with you when traveling to the program. SIT recommends that students insert this document into their passport so that it is easily accessible when requested by immigration officials. Even if yellow fever is not a requirement for your program, it is good practice to bring a copy of your immunization record with you, including your Covid 19 immunization card(s).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health Office](#).

Montespertoli is one of the safest cities in Italy with a very low crime rate, so no major considerations are necessary. Follow the advice of locals—e.g. if people do not go jogging in a certain area, and tell you not to, listen to them and don't do it.

ACCOMMODATIONS

You will live in apartments on the 13th-century estate of Castello Sonnino, and in the local town within walking distance from the Castle in Montespertoli in Tuscany. This unique cultural experience will provide insights into the life of the gentry in medieval Europe. You will have a two- or three-bedroom apartment, which will be shared with other students on the program and equipped with its own bathroom and kitchen.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

During the program students also will be lodging in hotels, or student residences depending on

availability.



TRANSPORTATION

Montespertoli is a small town, and you will likely be able to get where you need to go by walking. There are buses that operate within town and between Montespertoli and Florence or Empoli where a train can take you to both Florence and Pisa airport. Taxi service supplements the public transit system, but beware that taxis can only be called to an address or requested at a stand, not flagged down in the street. They can also be expensive so remember to stick to the timetables – There are no late night buses from Florence to Montespertoli so arrangements must be made if students wish to go out late in Florence. Uber does not operate outside of Rome and Milan at this time. Students are not permitted to hire a car during their stay.

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 cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their smart phone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting.

Students can obtain a SIM card in the local town upon arrival. The SIM card will require a brief registration and it will cost you about 20 euros, plus the amount of money you will decide to charge it with (for, example, you can start with 15 euros). These SIM cards will give you a local phone number and will allow you to receive free incoming calls.

Castello Sonnino also offers you free wireless Internet connection.

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, FedEx, UPS 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

Care Of
Castello Sonnino - Student services
Via Volterrana Nord, 6,
50025 Montespertoli FIPhone: 0571 609 198

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.

The local currency is the Euro. ATMs are widely available in all major cities, secondary towns and smaller municipalities. Rural areas may not have readily accessible ATMs and many establishments, especially in smaller locales, do not accept credit or debit cards so always keep this in mind when traveling. Visa and MasterCard are generally accepted while Discover and American Express are not very common.

Check current exchange rates:

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

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, 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\$800 to \$1,500**, remember that you don't need this in cash. 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 or specific personal expenses.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$500 – 1,100
Books, printing, supplies:	\$50
Up-front medical costs (you will get reimbursed for these expenses)	\$50 Per visit
COVID-19 Test(s) (optional; costs may vary)	\$100-250
Cell phone:	Varies by student
Estimated total:	\$800 – 1,500

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 can accommodate only their assigned student and 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.

If a student wishes to travel independently, they must submit a request that will be reviewed by the Academic Director and the Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing Regional Manager. SIT reserves the right to deny independent travel requests. Further details regarding the current independent travel protocols can be found here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/risk-management/covid-19-risk-management-protocols/>

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.

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

While informal dress is acceptable and common in most settings, it is essential to keep a neat, clean appearance. Jeans with holes, sloppy T-shirts and tank tops are discouraged. It is not necessary to be fashionable, just neat and clean. It is very important to have at least one set of clothes for semi-formal occasions and one set of clothes that can get dirty during excursions. You will experience the summer season so be sure to pack accordingly. It is advisable to bring clothes that can be worn in layers to adjust to changing temperatures in the evening. Shoulders should be covered when visiting churches, so be sure to pack accordingly.

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 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.

A laptop will be very useful for your coursework. Remember to bring any necessary adapters. It is not necessary to bring a printer.

The Castello Sonnino offers you free wireless Internet connection. There are also many coffee shops where one can have wifi access. Unfortunately, it is not possible to rent a laptop locally.

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



WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Many imported (North American) brands of toiletries, medicines, vitamins, etc., can be bought in Italy although local or European made brands can be a more affordable as a substitute. There are local as well as American brand tampons and cups available.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor.

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

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

PACKING LIST

GENERAL

- 1 nice outfit suitable for a social event
- Lightweight clothes including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts, opt. medium length skirt)
- Underwear and socks (10-day supply)
- Pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house and on excursions)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair sandals
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- 2–4 pairs pants or jeans
- 1 medium-length skirt and/or dress
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2–3 blouses or button-down shirts
- Sweater
- Jacket or fleece
- Bathing suit
- Optional – workout clothes

- Sunglasses
- Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap (for sun protection)

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Flashlight
- Italian/English dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- Laptop computer (*please insure it*)

OPTIONAL

- Travel guide (particularly if you plan to do post-program travel)
- Small camera and film/batteries (*please insure valuable cameras*)

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 Vaccination encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit (most supplies can be bought in town)
- Bug repellent
- Antihistamine/allergy medicine for pollen
- Extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)