

# Belgrade, Budapest, and Vienna: Comparative European Perspectives on Conflict and Democracy

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2025

## Country Overview

### GENERAL INFORMATION

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

With global climate change, weather is harder to predict; winters are milder and summers are much warmer, though these patterns can certainly vary.



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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.

## 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.

You will encounter many different opinions and various explanations as related to the themes of the semester: conflict and democracy. 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.

## IDENTITY

SIT creates an inclusive and safe space on our programs for students of all identities. Your experience in various cultural contexts beyond SIT spaces may be influenced by how certain identities are perceived locally. We encourage students to do research and utilize resources available to you to better prepare yourself for your experience abroad. Visit our [Identity Abroad](#) page for resources on how to get started.



The divisions between liberal and conservative values and way of life are globally more dominant and divisive and are present in Southeast and Central Europe as well. Serbia and the Balkans region tend to be more conservative, and LGBT rights are limited and subject to social struggles. LGBT rights in Hungary and gender equity have also been a target to policy change with the rise of illiberal trends. In Austria, LGBT communities have more visibility and rights, yet with the

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

strengthening of the far right, migrants and newcomers, are subject to policy change and political debates.

Belgrade is home to various civil society organizations, including LGBTiQ communities and feminist organizations. The program has extensive contacts with those communities in Belgrade and there is some support offered for LGBTQ students in the activist communities and in securing a safe, pleasant, and welcoming homestay.



### DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

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.

Meal customs are flexible in homestays and most can host vegetarian and vegan students. Gluten free products are available in some chain stores, yet maybe less than in the US. Every neighborhood has its local market with rich offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables. Kosher and/or halal restaurants are not common, though some new halal fast food places have been opened in recent years. |

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program ([studenthealth@sit.edu](mailto:studenthealth@sit.edu)). 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 you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](#) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](#) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](#) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on 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. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#). 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 personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

## 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.**

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family



members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.

On this program, you will be staying in one homestay. 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 ISP month students are given a stipend for their living expenses. They may opt to continue living with their host family in Belgrade.

### OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions.

During orientation, students stay in a small hotel near the program center. While on excursion to Budapest and Vienna, students stay in hotels in the city.

During the ISP month, students are given a stipend for their living expenses. They may opt to continue living with their host family in Belgrade.

### TRANSPORTATION

The most commonly used transportation in Belgrade is buses, trolley buses, and trams. Taxis are also widely available. Most of you will be commuting about **30-50 minutes a day** with public transport, or walk.

### 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.

Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

## PHONES AND INTERNET

### Cell Phone Policy

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.

Buying a local SIM card is easy 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 recorder to record interviews for field studies and ISP (or have a recording app on your phone). 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. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

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.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent once you enter your homestay, and you will be able to share your address.

## 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 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 are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

ATMs are easy to come by in Belgrade and in all big cities in Europe. 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. 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, ISP/Internship-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**

A suggested total amount of personal spending 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 or a specific personal expense.

Please budget approximately:

<b>Personal spending (from past student suggestions):</b>	1,500-2,500 USD
<b>Books, printing, supplies:</b>	100 USD

<b>Up-front medical costs:</b>	500 USD
<b>Potential ISP travel expenses:</b>	250 USD
<b>Visa:</b>	300 USD
<b>Typical Internet café usage:</b>	mostly free
<b>Estimated total:</b>	2,650 – 3,650 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

### 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 Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they 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.

### INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. 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.

### CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

## 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. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

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 one 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.

### COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

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

### 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 ask an alumni contact:

<https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/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.

Packing List sample:

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
- 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