

Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Summer 2026

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

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.

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.

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

JUN	JUL
72/52	75/54

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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 a 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.

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.

LOCAL 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.

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, and most of the main special diets (gluten-free, lactose-free, vegan, and vegetarian) can be accommodated by families and the program. However, the homestay family cannot always provide for particular diets.

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). 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. 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 on your program's [predeparture page](#)

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 throughout the program. You will be living with a Swiss or international family outside of Geneva in a small city, town, or village. Most of these communities are northeast of Geneva, near Nyon. Homes do not typically have air conditioning.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with other students during orientation.

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 with a local commuter rail pass that will cover all your transportation to/from your homestay and the program center for class. This train pass will allow you to travel in Switzerland for free for the duration of the program.

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.

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.

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 to the following address:

School for International Training—SIT Study Abroad
Student Name
Rue de Monthoux 64
1201 Genève
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.

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, and changing currencies. 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 cash, in case your credit card or ATM cards are stolen or lost.

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. Individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**

We suggest that you budget between US\$900 to \$2,000 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. 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. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are medical expenses, personal spending, independent travel, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending: (from past student suggestions)	\$500 – 1,200
Up-front medical costs: (any medical costs will get reimbursed)	\$250-600
Cell phone:	\$150 -200
Estimated total:	\$900 – 2,000

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 research 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.



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

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 and interviews.

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 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/>.

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. Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Only bring enough shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, etc. for the first few 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 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:

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
- 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/clean sneakers
- Sports clothes
- 1 swimsuit
- Shorts (May through September)
- 1 nice outfit - dress/skirt, nice shirt, and tie
- 2-3 pair pants and/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)
- 1 passport photo (in case your passport is lost or stolen)

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
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector