SIT SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING
STUDY ABROAD

Italy: Environmental Studies & Marine Ecosystems

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Italy is a peninsula located in southern Europe, surrounded by different branches of the Mediterranean Sea. The country is known for its rich cultural heritage, arts and architecture.
Italy is a Republic with the government located in the capital city of Rome. The country is divided into 20 regions and each region has its own traditional customs, dialects, and food culture. Although Italy has a long and complex history, it became a unified nation relatively recently, in 1861. As a result, strong regional identities remain, especially between the more industrialized North and the less economically developed South.

Italian is the official language, but many people also speak regional dialects, and English is commonly used in major cities and tourist areas. The population is predominantly of Italian ethnicity, with increasing diversity due to immigration in recent decades. Catholicism is the most widespread religion, and religious traditions remain an important part of cultural life, with churches present even in small villages and towns.

From an economic perspective, Italy is one of the major global economies, with strong industries in manufacturing, fashion, automotive production, and tourism. The country is also renowned for its agricultural products, including wine and olive oil.

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CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Students should be prepared for a Mediterranean climate across the program locations of Palermo (Sicily) and Cagliari (Sardinia).

Weather conditions during the program can vary considerably across program locations and throughout the semester. Temperatures may range from approximately 6-31°C (43-88°F), depending on the season, elevation, and local weather conditions. Rainfall and strong winds may occur, particularly in coastal areas such as Palermo and Cagliari. Students should pack clothing suitable for a variety of conditions, including lightweight clothing for warmer days, layers for cooler temperatures, a waterproof jacket, and comfortable closed-toe shoes.

Palermo, Italy:
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
59/48	59/48	61/50	66/55	73/61

AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
86/73	81/70	75/64	66/57	61/52

Cagliari, Italy:
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
57/43	59/43	63/46	66/50	73/57

AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
88/70	81/64	73/59	66/52	59/55

Students should also be mindful of sun exposure and dehydration during outdoor activities, particularly on warm and sunny days. Sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat, and a reusable water bottle are strongly recommended. Many program activities and excursions involve extended periods outdoors, including walking through urban areas, archaeological sites, coastal environments, and field-study locations. Windy and cool conditions can occur along the coasts of Sicily and Sardinia, particularly during ferry travel and outdoor activities, while colder temperatures may be experienced at higher elevations, such as during excursions on Mount Etna and on the Madonie mountains. Being prepared for a wide range of weather conditions will help ensure comfort and safety throughout the program.

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. Not every interaction requires such contact – in greeting strangers, a formal handshake will do. Formal greetings include expressions such as “Buongiorno” (good morning) and “Buonasera” (good evening), which are used in polite or professional contexts. When leaving in formal situations, people typically say “Arrivederci”. In informal contexts, however, “Ciao” is the most common greeting and can be used both when arriving and when leaving.

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.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

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 event and usually begins between 7:30pm and 9pm. The variety of foods and the depth of gastronomic tradition make it possible to meet the needs of most diets in Italy. 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

It is important to note 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 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.

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 on your program's predeparture page.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The housing fee covers accommodations during the entire program period. This includes during orientation, homestays or independent accommodations while at the program base, on all excursions, and during the evaluation period.

Students will stay either with host families, occupying a private bedroom and bathroom while sharing the rest of the apartment with their hosts, in university residences, or in shared apartments with private bedrooms and shared bathrooms. All accommodations include Wi-Fi and are located within 45 minutes of the program office.

During excursions, all students will be housed in shared guesthouses, field stations, lodges, or small hotels/hostels. Housing options during your Independent Study Project will be worked on together with the program's staff and must be approved by your academic director. Please note that ISP location may be limited due to public health or political concerns.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students while on excursions.

TRANSPORTATION

Students staying in Palermo should expect to rely mainly on public transportation such as buses and regional trains, depending on the location of their accommodation and daily activities. Commuting within the city is typically manageable, though buses can be busy and delayed, especially during peak hours. For organized excursions, transportation will be more varied and may include airplanes for longer distances, as well as trains, ferries, and private buses.

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.

Data plans are often cheaper in Italy than in the US, making messaging apps and email the most cost-effective communication tools. Students should keep in mind the time difference when contacting home, which is typically several hours ahead of North America, and may also shift slightly due to daylight saving time changes. The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. Wi-Fi is widely available in accommodations and in classroom locations.

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, and 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, you'll get the complete address in your Center Director letter that will be sent to you closer to your departure.

MONEY

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. For this reason, students should keep a modest amount of cash available for incidental expenses while avoiding carrying large sums. 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.

We suggest that you budget between US$1400 to $1900 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 textbooks, Field Study Project or Internship-related expenses (if applicable) not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	$ 1000 – 1500
Books, printing, supplies:	$ 50
Up-front medical costs:	$ 300
Cell phone:	Varies by student
Estimated total:	$ 1400 – 1900

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance BlueCross BlueShield, 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. 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 strongly recommend a backpack, 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

Lightweight clothing such as t-shirts, blouses, and breathable fabrics are ideal for warmer months, while a light jacket or sweater is useful for cooler evenings or air-conditioned spaces. Comfortable walking shoes are essential, as students will likely spend a lot of time on foot exploring the city. It is also advisable to bring a small day bag or backpack, sunglasses, and sun protection. When visiting churches or religious sites, modest clothing is expected. This generally means covering shoulders and knees, so packing a scarf or shawl can be helpful.

EQUIPMENT

Students should be prepared for a variety of outdoor excursions that require appropriate clothing and a moderate level of physical readiness. For trips to Mount Etna and the Madonie mountains, it is important to bring sturdy, closed-toe shoes suitable for hiking, as well as layered clothing since temperatures can be cooler at higher elevations. A light jacket, reusable water bottle, sunscreen, and a hat are strongly recommended. A small backpack for day trips will be useful to carry essentials.

Many activities will involve extended periods outdoors, including marine or environmental field activities. Students participating in activities near the coast or at sea may also wish to bring a swimsuit, quick-drying clothing, and footwear suitable for rocky shorelines or boat excursions.

Because the program spans a range of environments, from mountain landscapes to coastal and urban settings across the central Mediterranean, students are encouraged to pack versatile clothing that can accommodate changing weather conditions and diverse activities. Those with specific medical needs or sensitivities to heat, sun exposure, or physical activity should ensure they bring any necessary medications and discuss accommodations with program staff before departure.

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/.

Wi-Fi is available in homestays, academic facilities, and public spaces in Palermo, although connection speeds and reliability may vary. Connectivity may be limited during excursions. Because the program includes educational excursions, students are encouraged to back up important files and use protective cases for electronic devices while traveling. Italy uses 230V electricity and Type C, F, and L plugs.

GIFTS (IN CASE OF HOMESTAYS)

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

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 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:

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
- Flip flops (for use inside student accommodations and on excursions)
- 1 pair comfortable walking shoes
- 1 pair nice shoes
- 1 pair sturdy closed-toe shoes or light hiking shoes
- Small backpack/daypack
- 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
- 1-2 sweaters
- Warm jacket or fleece
- Warm layer suitable for high-elevation excursions
- 1 hat (for sun protection)
- Optional – Bathing suit and beach towel
- Optional – snorkeling mask
- Optional – 1 pair sandals
- Optional – workout clothes

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

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