Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

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 eight million people live in Switzerland. Of these, more than 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.



School for International Training
1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA
P: 888 272-7881
F: 802 258-3296
studyabroad@sit.edu
studyabroad.sit.edu

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

During your stay in Switzerland, the temperatures and humidity will vary significantly; make sure to bring a panel of clothes to match with these differences, especially warm and waterproof clothes and shoes for the winter season.



LOCAL CUSTOMS

Regarding greetings, please note that under normal circumstances people in Switzerland either shake hands or kiss on the cheeks (three kisses). People usually shake hands in a formal context and kiss between friends and family members. Further information will be given during orientation.

Please note that Swiss people are more reserved and formal in general than Americans, so please wear appropriate dress according to local norms, settings, and activities, and don't be too loud in public spaces.

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. In the cities, all kinds of food can be found.

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.

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.

MEAL PLANNING

For students staying in homestays:
Homestay families generally provide breakfast and dinner during the week and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the weekend (except of course when students are not at home, or during the study trip).
The cost for lunches paid by the students vary depending if you eat in restaurants every day or take a sandwich from a grocery store (see the Money section of this document)

For students staying in residences:
You will be responsible for all your meals (breakfasts, lunches and dinners), with costs varying based on whether you purchase groceries and cook your own meals or eat in restaurants (see the Money section of this document).

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.

HOUSING:

The housing fee covers accommodations during the entire program period. This includes during orientation, homestays or residence while at the program base, on all excursions, and during the evaluation period.
This program offers the option of choosing either a homestay or residence.

HOMESTAY

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.

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. Daily travel to the program center is included and covered by the Swiss Pass provided to students.

All students will have their own private room but may have to share a bathroom.

HOUSING: RESIDENCE

As an alternative housing option, some students will stay in a residence offering individual rooms in shared apartments. The residence is located in Geneva, close to the program center, not far from the railway station and the airport, with convenient access to public transportation. Daily travel to the program center is included and covered by the Swiss Pass provided to students.

Each student will have a private room, while restrooms/bathrooms, kitchen and lounge room are shared with 3-4 other students. Students are responsible for arranging their own breakfast, lunches and dinners.

A gym membership is included.

The building welcomes other international students, fostering a dynamic and multicultural atmosphere. Living in the residence requires a good level of independence, as students are expected to manage their daily routine such as cooking, doing laundry (see costs indicated in the “Money” section below), taking care of their health and mental health, and maintaining their living space—while engaging respectfully in shared areas. This will also require goodwill and mutual support among the students living in the residence.

Liability insurance is included, with a deductible of CHF 500 per incident, payable by the student (a check-in will be conducted at both the beginning and the end of the stay)

Further details about the residence and its facilities will be provided during the in-country orientation in Geneva.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS (ORIENTATION/EXCURSION)

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions.
During orientation students will stay in a hostel in Geneva and during the study trip, you will be staying in hotels.

During the ISP period, students continue to live with their homestay families in Geneva or in the residence. If, in rare cases, students elect to conduct ISP research outside of Geneva for a few days, and are approved, the student is responsible for arranging different accommodations and for any additional costs incurred.



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.

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.

During orientation, program staff will indicate to students a local shop where sim cards can easily be obtained. Prices vary depending on student needs and commercial discounts in different period of the year (for a package with unlimited call, text and data in Switzerland and Europe, including some minutes with the United-States, the monthly cost is around 50-70chf. The cost of the new sim card, about 60CHF, will be added to the first invoice).

Keep in mind the time difference between Switzerland and your home country. Calling your friends/family will not be possible every day. We usually recommend students to use online applications (WhatsApp, Facetime, etc) to call the US, in order to avoid roaming fees (if they don't have international plans).

Regarding contacting home for safe arrival confirmation at the beginning of the program, students will have free Wi-Fi access at the hostel they will be staying for the first nights.

The SIT program center provides Wi-Fi access during office hours.

Students have to bring their own laptops to the program. They will be responsible for fixing or replacing their laptops in a timely manner in case of technical issues.

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

The Swiss franc, denoted CHF (which stands for the Confoederatio Helvetica franc), is the official currency of Switzerland. The Swiss franc is available in banknotes, which bear the value of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, or 1000 francs. ATMs are easily available close to the program center. Credit cards can be used in most shops and restaurants in Switzerland (except sometimes for small amounts, or in certain more rural areas).



Students should bring a money belt with them to keep their money and passport, to avoid pickpocketing issues.

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 **3,300-7,900 USD (for students staying in homestay), and between USD 7'050-12'600 USD (for students staying in the residence**) 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 meals not provided by the program, textbooks, Independent Study Project or Internship-related expenses 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):	**800-3,000 USD**
Meals not provided (for students in HOMESTAY):	**1800-2500 USD**
Meals not provided (for students in RESIDENCE)	**5400-7000 USD**

Laundry (for students in RESIDENCE):	**150-200 USD**
Books, printing, supplies:	**50 USD**
Independent local travel:	**350- 2000 USD**
Cell phones and minutes:	**300-350 USD**
ESTIMATED TOTAL FOR STUDENTS STAYING IN HOMESTAYS:	**3'300-7'900 USD**
ESTIMATED TOTAL FOR STUDENTS STAYING IN RESIDENCE:	**7'050-12'600 USD**
To also consider: Up-front medical costs (reimbursed by insurance):	**500-800 USD**

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/residences 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

You should bring a two- to three-week supply of clothes. Europeans tend to dress more formally than Americans, particularly in Geneva. Also, remember that you may need clothes that are suitable to a business environment for interviews and visits to international organizations. Students on the program generally wear business-casual clothing for four days a week during regular classes, as well as for interviews and meetings during ISP time. You may want to consider this as you pack. Students also generally recommend bringing clothing that you enjoy wearing, as you will wear the same things over and over. Plan to dress in layers—as it gets warmer or colder, you can simply eliminate or add layers. You might find it more expensive to purchase your clothes in Switzerland, but there are many stores in Geneva where you might like to shop.

Spring semester students should prepare for warm to cool/damp weather with some snow in February and early March. Comfortable walking shoes are a must.

EQUIPMENT

We recommend that you carry your passports, credit cards, money, and other valuable items in a safety belt.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is required that you bring a laptop computer. 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).

With your computer you will need to bring both a voltage converter and a plug adapter.

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

Students will be responsible to fix or replace their laptops in a timely manner in case of technical issue. Computers are not readily available to students on this program. If you want to have constant, easy access to a computer, it is a good idea to have an extended warranty in Europe in case of repairs.

People usually do not rent computers in Switzerland, other than using a cybercafé. It is best to have your own laptop computer, as all the homestays and residences have WiFi. The SIT office also has WiFi, as do several public spaces in Geneva. We advise students not to leave a laptop without surveillance.

GIFTS (FOR STUDENTS STAYING IN 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. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family.

If you will be staying with a host family, you may wish to bring a small gift as a gesture of appreciation for their hospitality. Something local from your region would be thoughtful, for instance your favorite spices so you can share some of your own dishes with them.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Only bring enough shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, etc. for the first few days. These items are often heavy and space consuming, and they can easily be bought in Switzerland.

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/.

Packing List

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

GENERAL

- 3-5 pairs of neat jeans
- 4 shirts (three fairly dressy – short and long sleeve)
- 3 nice outfits – dress/skirt, sports coat, and tie
- 5 pairs pants and/or skirts – casual and dressy
- 2 sweaters (1 fairly heavy)
- Underwear (one-week supply)
- 1 set of long underwear (helps fight the cold and damp)
- Socks (one-week supply)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown
- 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 sneakers
- 1 pair winter boots or wet weather shoes
- 1 cold weather, all-purpose coat is necessary (perhaps a raincoat with a zip-in lining would be better than both a raincoat and a winter coat)
- Hat, scarf, and gloves
- 1 money belt for safety reasons

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- University ID (if you have one, you can get discounts)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- Birth certificate for students staying in Homestays (for communal registration)
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

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.

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Soap and washcloth (only for hostel before moving to homestay/residence)
- Fold-up umbrella
- Laptop computer
- Photos of home, school, friends, etc.
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector