Program Orientation Information
During the first few days of the program at the launch site there will be orientation sessions covering program policy, staff and student roles and responsibilities, health and safety guidelines, academic policies, culture shock, and community building.

There will also be an orientation session in the first day or two of each country covering country specific details.

Classroom Space
In all of the countries you visit, you will generally have a “main” classroom location where you will attend faculty lectures and welcome guest lecturers. However, the city will also become your classroom as you go on site visits, explore neighborhoods, conduct research, and travel to other sites within the region.

Diet
Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in many countries. You should be willing to try the local cuisine and share in your host family’s mealtimes. Special or restricted diets may not 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 will miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Be clear with your family about your dietary needs. It is always a good idea to be very honest with your host family as to what you like and dislike, as this will inform the remaining weeks of your semester. SIT homestay parents are generally used to our students negotiating around quantities of food.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context. In some locations, we cannot guarantee zero exposure to certain foods or a given allergen.

Vietnam: Vietnamese cuisine shows diversity from north to south, as well as similarities with Chinese and Southeast Asian cuisine. Even French cuisine and food culture has been adapted in striking ways. There is an emphasis on fresh vegetables and
herbs, often served in a broth or light sauce. The most common meats used in Vietnamese cuisine are pork, beef, prawns, various kinds of fish, and chicken.

Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, and Hanoi offer a fantastic range of food choices that can compete with any world city – ranging from small outdoor food stalls, to Asian, European and American-style restaurants, and even some familiar fast food chains. A good choice for breakfast is the world-renowned pho, a noodle soup usually made with beef or chicken. Lunch will typically consist of rice with meat or fish, plus a side vegetable dish and soup. Sandwiches with pâté and other fillings are also common quick meals. Vietnamese dinners are often more elaborate, including several shared meat and vegetable dishes, usually accompanied by rice and soup.

It is possible to maintain a vegetarian diet while in Vietnam, though you may wish to ask whether fish or meat products have been added to vegetable dishes. Veganism is practiced by some Vietnamese Buddhists, particularly on festival days, and there are some vegan restaurants. For those wishing to remain Kosher, pork is a popular meat and flavoring, but milk and dairy products are rarely used in cooking. Yogurt is available and often used in blended fruit drinks.

Morocco: During Orientation, you will stay at a hotel and have lunch and dinner at either the Center for Cross Cultural Learning (CCCL), the program’s host institution, or in local restaurants near your hotel. During the homestay period, you will have breakfast and dinner with your host families, while lunch will be served mostly at the CCCL. On weekends, except when there is a group excursion organized by the program, you will have all meals with your homestay families. Homestay families decide on mealtimes and can accommodate a vegetarian diet, but are not able to provide for kosher or vegan diets. Please inform us in advance of any special dietary needs to see if and how they may be accommodated.

Bolivia: The local diet in Bolivia is centered mostly on meat and potatoes. However, many seasonal vegetables and fruits are available year round. Spicy food is popular and salsa can always be found. Like in many Latin American countries, the largest meal is usually eaten in the middle of the day.

Local Customs:

Vietnam: Most of the Vietnamese in urban areas no longer bow when they meet each other. The custom of handshaking is now achieving popularity due to the Western influence in the country. Men will generally shake hands and say the equivalent of "how are you" and tip their hats when greeting people. Women, especially those in the countryside, still shy away from shaking hands, especially with men from their own country. It is best not to offer to shake hands with a woman unless she offers her hand first.

Whereas Americans often immediately introduce themselves in given situations, the ordinary people of Vietnam think this to be rather bold and like to have a mutual acquaintance make the introduction. They will rarely introduce themselves when going into a home or office until asked to do so. This may be due to their innate shyness and modesty. Names carry great importance in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese names consist of a family name, middle name and a personal or given name. The order is reverse to the American custom. For instance, Miss Hoang Ngoc Van. Hoang is the family name. We would call her Miss Van.

Vietnamese people have a habit of not looking into your eyes when they talk to you. This is often because of shyness, but another reason is that traditionally they do not look into the eyes of those they respect or those higher in rank when talking to them. This is to indicate politeness. The smile of a Vietnamese can be confusing to foreigners and cause misunderstandings. It may indicate a polite, but perhaps skeptical reaction to something, compliance or toleration of a blunder or misunderstanding, or on occasion represent submission to judgment that may be wrong or unfair.

Morocco: In general, greetings start in Morocco with Salam Alikoom and often a handshake between people of the same gender. Urban Moroccans may
also kiss on the cheeks for greetings especially among people from the same gender.

As a rule you should keep the following in mind: Morocco is a deeply conservative and religious society; its political and social order is extremely hierarchical. As a constitutional monarchy its political culture is not as open as in the US and people are nervous about frank political discussions. Journalists practice self-censorship; government officials are extremely stingy with information, and the police are not to be antagonized. The general rule you should apply to your conduct and etiquette is an attitude of extremely vigilant modesty, patience, tolerance, warmth, generosity and most of all deference to anyone older than you and to women. Any suggestion of sexual flirtation between foreigners and Moroccans can easily be misinterpreted as inappropriate or insulting.

The importance of Islam in Moroccan culture cannot be underestimated. Regardless of your personal beliefs, you must take this fact very seriously. Morocco shares many basic rules of etiquette with the rest of the Muslim world. Some of these are: never use your left hand to wave at people, shake their hand, or point to things. The left hand is seen as unclean. When eating food with your hands or touching food, only use your right hand. Carelessly using your left hand can be seen as insulting, rude, and uncouth. Never show the soles of your feet or shoes to people, as this is insulting. Never put your feet up on a chair or desk. If it is expected, be extremely courteous and conscientious about taking your shoes off when entering buildings. Women should carry light scarves with them so they can cover their hair when interacting with devout Muslims, entering religious buildings, especially mosques, or even for walking through conservative areas.

Your homestay families live in the old part of the city and the whole neighborhood community is an extension of the families. Moroccans are very conservative with regard to any display of couples’ affection. While holding hands can be acceptable, more openly affectionate gestures such as kissing are not acceptable. Short skirts, tank tops, and revealing dresses are to be avoided. You will likely find these social norms to be oppressive, and so do many Moroccan women, but you are a guest and thus must comply with norms even if you disagree with them. These concessions to local mores, wearing modest and conservative clothes, will make your experience easier. Staying out late and coming back home with alcohol on your breath is not acceptable for either males or females. Walking alone late at night is not generally appropriate, but the way to go about this (in case you meet friends and would like to occasionally stay a little bit late) is to inform your family and make sure a male friend or family member escorts you to your family’s house.

Bolivia: In Bolivia, women greet men (and other women) with a saludo (i.e. —buenos dias!) and a kiss on the cheek. Men greet men with a saludo and a handshake often followed by a pat on the right shoulder. Upon entering or leaving any room, Bolivians always greet everyone in the room individually. People generally do not walk around barefoot, even inside the home, so you should bring slippers or flip-flops to wear in your homestay. Bolivians do not generally eat alone. If eating a snack in front of others, you should always offer some of your food (or drink) to those with you. Upon finishing a meal, Bolivians say —gracias, in which the response is —buen provecho. Conversely, one might say —buen provecho after the meal, and the response would then be —gracias— either way is fine.

Transportation:
Across locations, students will often use public transportation. Specifics on public transportation will be discussed during the orientation upon your arrival in a country.

Vietnam: You have the option of travel by taxi, or bicycle.

Morocco: The Center for Cross Cultural Learning is located in the medina. The medina is only a few minutes’ walk from Rabat’s city center and main railway station. Rabat now has a very hectic bus system due to recent changes happening in the capital to reform public transportation, including a tramway; however most buses service all neighborhoods. City taxis are available outside the
medina and the fare depends on the distance covered (taxis have meters). Taxis remain the best and most reliable means of transportation in the cities; we strongly recommend them to our students for their availability, inexpensiveness, and safety. For the program's scheduled group excursions, buses are hired and remain at the program's disposal throughout the time of the excursion. For any independent travel on weekends, it is recommended that you use the train whenever possible (not all destinations are serviced by the railway system). Otherwise, it is preferable to take an inter-city bus, and in particular, the C-T-M, a reliable semi-public transportation company.

Bolivia: You will use a variety of transportation during the program including taxis and buses. While staying in the program base of Cochabamba, walking and riding in small mini-buses, and taxis will be your most common form of transportation.

Homestays and Other Accommodations
As many IHP and SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. You will learn firsthand the joys and responsibilities of being a guest, a family member, and a friend. You will also have the opportunity to share your culture and to learn from another’s culture. 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 place, and SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families. For example, 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. They may be quite familiar with your hometown or with international students, or your homestay family may not know much about where you come from. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” (i.e., the physical nature of the house) 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 possibly new priorities and expectations.

Country coordinators in each location will arrange homestay placements. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. Please note: You will not receive information about your homestay family before you arrive in each country.

Not all of your lodging will be in homestays. You may also stay in hostels, hotels, rural villages, and other types of lodging. The key is to be flexible. Many students appreciate bringing a ‘sleep sack’ (a sleeping bag liner or a sheet folded in half and sewn down the side).

Money
In addition to tuition, SIT Study abroad program fees cover room and three meals a day throughout the program except for vacation. When meals are not provided by the program or homestay family, students will be provided a stipend. SIT will provide transportation for program-related excursions and activities that are part of the normal program itinerary, but students are responsible for the cost of daily transportation to and from class. Course materials are made available digitally and there will be some photocopies of course materials available to check out. Printing additional paper copies of course readers are the students’ responsibility. Please plan accordingly.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. This is very important; if you don’t inform these companies that you will be away, when they see charges from another country, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. Make sure that your PIN is only four digits — longer PINs don’t always work in other countries. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes

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be very expensive. Ask your bank if they have any partner banks in the countries you are traveling to. Fees are often lower through these partner banks. 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. If they will expire while you are overseas, please contact your bank and/or credit card companies for early renewal. It is also very important that you make photocopies of the front and back of all your debit/credit cards and leave them with someone you trust just in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen. Also scan and e-mail yourself a copy.

Having some U.S. cash for cases where ATMs are not available or not working is a good idea. Consider bringing $100-$300 to keep as a reserve for this purpose.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for personal spending, local travel, and one meal per day. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and these costs are averages.

A suggested total amount of money to budget is around US$ 1,600-$2,200. 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 costs for your vacation or a specific personal expense.

Check current exchange rates: http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/

Please budget approximately:

| Personal spending (from past student suggestions): | $300-$800 |
| Visa registration: | $300 |
| Local transportation: | $500 |
| Books, printing, supplies: | $100-$200 |
| Up-front medical costs: | $400 |
| Estimated total: | $1,600-$2,200 |

Using travelers’ checks is still a safe way to carry money, since these can be replaced in case of theft or loss. However, traveler’s checks may be harder to exchange and may not give good exchange rates, but are still the safest way to bring your money. Cash is usually easier and faster to change and gets better exchange rates, but there is no insurance in case of loss or other problems. ATMs are widely available in all of the cities we’ll visit. A money belt large enough to hold your passport and traveler’s checks is useful.

**Vietnam**: The local currency is the Vietnamese Dong. While Vietnamese Dong can be purchased in some large U.S. banks, it is also very easy to get upon arrival in Vietnam. Students may exchange U.S. currency or withdraw Vietnamese Dong from an ATM machine inside the international airport in Hanoi upon arrival. ATM machines are in abundance throughout Vietnam. Many restaurants, large department stores and tourist boutiques take major credit cards, such as Visa and MasterCard. A Visa or MasterCard can also be helpful in emergencies, medical or otherwise.

**Morocco**: Many banks have ATM machines, so it is relatively easy to get money. However, the program recommends that you only withdraw what money you need at the time. Keep in mind that ATM machines are generally only found in cities and towns and some branches are not available in the smaller towns and rural areas. A Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit card is very useful for emergencies, medical or otherwise. Though it is always good to come with some money in traveler’s checks, banks may require a service fee of 10 Moroccan Dirhams (Dhs) to cash them. A few banks will cash traveler’s checks, such as Banque du Maroc, Credit du Maroc and BMCE, but they all require you bring a receipt from the bank where you purchased the check with you. It is also possible to wire money to Morocco using Western Union, which is now available in all urban centers.

**Bolivia**: Most former SIT students have used ATM cards to access their spending money during the program. ATM cards (Cirrus and PLUS) work in Bolivia’s major cities. However, in case your ATM
card gets stolen, lost, or de-magnetized, it is important to have emergency money in dollars. Some students bring American Express travelers checks, however most previous students have found it difficult and inconvenient to cash traveler’s checks in Bolivia. If bringing travelers checks, be sure to keep a list of your check numbers separate from your checks! Since it is not always possible to use ATM cards or traveler’s checks everywhere you might visit in Bolivia, SIT also advises you to bring a small amount of money in cash (approximately US$100). Dollars are widely accepted in Bolivia. Credit cards (VISA, MasterCard) work at many places in the major cities, but usually only for significant purchases. If necessary, it is possible to get cash advances on major credit cards in Bolivian banks. Wire transfers through Western Union to Bolivia are possible but expensive.

Communication
It’s important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the program. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call, thereby avoiding frustration and making connections more meaningful. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion. While you are encouraged to share with those close to you and use them for support whenever necessary, it is also important to remember that you are on the program for just a few months, and that you get out of the program what you put into it. Do not set family or friends up with expected communication during arrivals and departures to/from new locations. It is not always possible for students to gain internet or phone access immediately upon arrival in a new country; SIT will post safe arrival updates on its facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/SITStudyAbroad. When you arrive in a new country, you will have many immediate obligations, including getting to your accommodations, eating a full meal, recovering from jet lag, meeting your new host family, attending required scheduled sessions, evening engagements, and getting oriented.

Phones and Email
All students are required to have a working cell phone while on SIT Study Abroad programs. This policy is part of our commitment to student safety and will facilitate communication in case of an emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they are reachable by phone at all times. This means keeping the phone charged and stocked with airtime/minutes as well as notifying staff of, and replacing, lost or stolen phones. Please note that students who do not comply with the cell phone policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

Students can buy a phone in the US or upon arrival in the first non-US country. If you wish to obtain a cell phone prior to departure some options can be found here. Please bear in mind that a basic cell phone with simple call and text messaging is the best option for all programs. Expensive or flashy phones (including iPhones) are not recommended as these may attract unwanted attention in some economically depressed areas. Look for an unlocked quad-band phone so it will work in multiple countries. Buying SIM chips as you travel from country to country is much cheaper than buying an international SIM chip. (Please note that it can be difficult for non-nationals to purchase SIM cards in certain countries.) You should research costs of making international calls and you may want to consider setting up a Skype account as well. You and/or your family member will be able to load credit to your Skype account, which can be used to call international cell phones. (Check out: http://www.skype.com/en/offers/skype-credit/)

Please do not use a host family’s phone for overseas calls. Even with a phone card, the host family may be charged a service fee just to dial out. Host phones should be reserved for the family’s use.
Vietnam: Telecommunications is not cheap in Vietnam and international phone calls are expensive, however, access to local and international phone lines is easy throughout Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, and Hanoi. Phone calls from Vietnam cost about US$1-2 per minute, and faxes may cost US$1-2 per page. It is much less expensive to call from the U.S. to Vietnam.

You can check with your local service provider (in the US) to find out if the same number and phone will work in Vietnam or not. If you find that your phone will not work in Vietnam, it may be possible to procure a phone and SIM card in Vietnam. However, in the case you are not able to procure a SIM card, be sure to make plans for alternative communication.

Most places that you stay in Vietnam will offer internet services, and some places have wireless internet available. In addition, there are various Internet cafes around Ho Chi Minh, Can Tho, Hanoi (usually less than US$1/hour). If you have a laptop, there are some up-market coffee shops in Hanoi with wireless Internet access.

Morocco: Public phones (téléboutiques) are plentiful but you have to pay for local phone cards. You can also buy a cellular phone with which to make and receive calls. The prices have substantially gone down in the last few years so you can get a functional cellular phone for between US$30 and $50. Phone companies also run promotions on phone units on a regular basis.

The program does provide email access to students within CCCL buildings and during office hours of CCCL. During excursions, outside office hours, or on weekends, email and internet access are widely and easily available in most areas at Internet cafés for a fee of 7 to 10 Dhs per hour. Although the CCCL has wireless service in certain areas, the building is closed after 6:00 pm daily and on the weekends and holidays.

Bolivia: Most of your host families will have phones. If you use a reliable international calling card, you will be able to phone the US as often as you like. However, you will not be allowed to make direct long distance calls from those phones without a calling card. Pay-as-you-go cell phones are recommended and can be purchased in Bolivia for about $50. This is a very convenient way to stay in touch with people from your program as well as with friends and family back in the US. Other options include the international calling centers or phone cafes available throughout the city.

Mail

Mail delivery can be unpredictable and erratic. Mail can take from ten days to three weeks or sometimes even longer to reach its destination. SIT does not forward student mail, and cannot be responsible for lost mail. Please account for 2-3 weeks shipping time when deciding which address to use.

An updated address list will be provided to you prior to the start of the program.

Remember, shipping can be VERY expensive!

Sending and receiving packages is another matter, however. 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 (due to customs delays) that the recipient is nearly out of the country by the time the items are received. For these reasons, unless it is an emergency, parents and loved ones should refrain from sending packages. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Please inform parents, grandparents, significant others, and anyone else who might think of sending you packages, of the above. If it is necessary for someone to send you a package, please have them contact your admissions counselor.

Climate

Can Tho: Average High/Low Temperatures (°F)

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### Visitors and Free Time

Parents or friends may wish to visit students while they are abroad. This can be a wonderful experience; however, we strongly urge that such visits take place after the program’s conclusion or during vacation(s). Based on our experience, we know that visits can take significant time away from the program as well as cause emotional tension, while also disrupting academic focus and the cycle of cultural immersion and integration. SIT does not allow students to miss program activities to accommodate visitor schedules nor will the program allow visitors' participation in program activities. The Dean of Custom and Comparative programs must be notified of all visitors.

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student(s) and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests. Additionally, students are not allowed to stay with homestays during vacation(s).

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes, guest lectures and field-based learning activities. 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.

On average students have two free days a week during the program. For safety reasons, during free time you should always travel with at least one other person, and provide destination and contact details to the local coordinator. Keep your hosts advised of your schedule and inform them if you will be coming home late or missing a meal.

### Vacation

There will be a vacation period at the end of your time in Morocco. Vacation dates and other relevant details will be sent in an email from your admissions counselor. Students are responsible for making their own vacation plans and covering all costs during this time. Students are not allowed to leave the country while on vacation.

To help plan vacation, IHP coordinators may provide contact information of local resources (e.g., travel agents, volunteer or local opportunities). However, you are fully responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of vacation and/or independent travel, including but not limited to accommodations, meals and transportation. SIT is not responsible for supervising students during independent travel, vacation, or time away from the program.

SIT does not allow participants to travel outside of the country where the vacation is based; vacation should be used as a time for rest and relaxation. Travel outside of the country can lead to visa complications, logistical concerns for re-joining the group, and increased fatigue from cumulative travel. There are many fun vacation opportunities within each region and country.

You are responsible for advising your parents/guardians about your vacation plans. You are also responsible for providing program staff with your travel destination(s) and relevant contact information. You will be given phone numbers and email addresses of the program staff in case of emergency during vacation. Understand that contact may not be immediate.
Alumni Mentor
If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor or ask an alumni mentor: http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/eop_contact_alum.cfm. Alumni can be a useful resource for answering your questions and providing recommendations specific to your itinerary.