Country Overview

Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy
Fall 2016

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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.

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.

Average Geneva minimum and maximum temperatures in Fahrenheit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-42°F</td>
<td>36-51°F</td>
<td>42-59°F</td>
<td>48-66°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>53-69°F</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44-58°F</td>
<td>37-47°F</td>
<td>31-40°F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Diet
Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in Switzerland. 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.

Generally people in Switzerland eat three times a day. In the morning between 6:30AM and 8:30AM is breakfast time, a mid-day meal takes place between 12:00PM and 2:00PM, and the evening meal usually takes place between 6:30PM and 8:30PM. In the cities, all kinds of food can be found; however, the homestay family cannot always provide for particular diets.

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.

**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. 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 culture, 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.

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.

In 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.

**Other Accommodations**

During the excursions, you will be staying in small hotels and student hostels.

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

**Local Customs**

Regarding greetings, please note that people in Switzerland either shake hands or kiss on the cheeks (three kisses). People 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 loud in public spaces.

**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.

**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. Daily commuting costs will be determined by the program. During the ISP period, students will receive a stipend for food only, based on the cost of living at the program base. Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP are the students’ responsibility. Please plan accordingly.

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. 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. 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 all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust just in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. 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 ranges from **US$1500 to $4000**. 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 independent travel or a specific personal expense.

*Remember to inform your bank or credit card company of your travel plans*

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

Please budget approximately:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal spending (from past student suggestions):</th>
<th>800-3000 USD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books, printing, supplies:</td>
<td>50 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency permit (for visa):</td>
<td>325 USD/ 265 CHF (Don’t forget about the fee that you pay for your visa in the US. In total, the visa will cost you about 465 USD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phone and minutes</td>
<td>200 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-front medical costs</td>
<td>200 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical Internet café usage:</td>
<td>5 USD/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent local travel:</td>
<td>350 USD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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. We have a few suggestions regarding communication during the term, based upon our experience.

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, 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 one term, and that you get out of the program what you put into it.

**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 cell 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.

You can buy a cellular (mobile) phone in Switzerland. It can facilitate the communication with your fellow students and different contacts for your independent research. Visitors who wish to use a prepaid SIM card will be required to register with the service provider and produce identification. You can buy a Switzerland-compatible world phone, rent a phone for Switzerland, or buy a SIM card that works in Switzerland. 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.

If you wish to obtain a cell phone prior to departure, some options can be found here, under the “Contact and Communications” tab.

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.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. You will have free access to email at the Cyberspace of the United Nations Library, as well as at cyber-cafes in Geneva for a small fee.

**Mailings**

Throughout the semester, posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

School for International Training  
Student Name  
Rue de Monthoux 64  
1201 Genève  
SUISSE
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 back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, unless it is an emergency, sending packages should be done on a needs basis. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. (This certainly includes laptops! For this reason, make sure you bring your laptop with you on the plane if you think you’ll want it in country). If you will be celebrating a birthday during the program, please inform parents, grandparents, significant others, and anyone else who might think of sending you packages, of the above.

For this program, DHL and FEDEX services are available in country. For this program, reliance on the U.S. Postal Service is not advised; while they may send packages for a cheaper price, timeliness and reliability have been more inconsistent than with the preferred express mailing agencies. When given the option, it’s always a good idea to send packages certified and with a number that allows the sender to track the package online.

The delivery services listed above sometimes require a phone number to mail a package internationally. If the student has a cell phone in country, please use that number. In instances in which student participants do not have individual cell phones, please contact the SIT Study Abroad Office of Student Affairs at 802-258-3212 or call toll-free at 1-888-272-7881.

**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 programs 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 Attendance Policy.

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 and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students’ guests.

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. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

**Students on an excursion to the United Nations Library**

Please see the Independent Travel Policy document for more information on travel outside the regular program itinerary.
Alumni Contact
If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor at 802-257-7751 or ask an alumni contact: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/

Lecture at the Institute for European Studies in Brussels

Students typically have four weeks to conduct research, gather and analyze data, write, and prepare for the ISP presentation. There is a lot to cover, and students find the ISP period a very busy time. For this reason, please plan to use your time wisely.