General Information

Switzerland lies in the heart of Western Europe. It is a small (41,285 square kilometers) country, but with its mountains and hills, rivers and lakes, it boasts a diverse landscape from west to east. It’s a federal republic with a semi-direct democracy and three political levels: the central government, the 26 cantons, and about 2,700 communes. The modern Swiss Confederation was established in 1848. Switzerland has a high population density, is divided between four different language regions, and reflects a number of cultures. Over seven million people live in Switzerland. Of these, 20% are foreigners.

Switzerland’s most important “natural resource” is education. Otherwise, the country has no raw materials to speak of. Its economy is based on the development and production of high quality goods. The standard of living in Switzerland is high. Its neutrality, development, cooperation, and humanitarianism form the foundations of its foreign policy. The Swiss have strong political and economic ties with the rest of the world, and Switzerland is a member of various international organizations. They also signed bilateral agreements with the European Union on various issues.

The program will also go on a five-day excursion to Rabat, Morocco.

A view of the city of Geneva and Lake Geneva

The entrance of Rabat Harbor
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:

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<th></th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>APR</th>
<th>MAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>30-42 °F</td>
<td>36-51 °F</td>
<td>42-59 °F</td>
<td>42-59 °F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td></td>
<td>36-51 °F</td>
<td>42-59 °F</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPT</td>
<td>53-69 °F</td>
<td>OCT</td>
<td>NOV</td>
<td>DEC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td></td>
<td>44-58 °F</td>
<td>37-47 °F</td>
<td>31-41 °F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
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Weather during our Morocco excursion will be significantly warmer and drier:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>48-66 °F</td>
<td>57-77 °F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
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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 7:00AM and 8:30AM is breakfast time, a midday meal takes place between 12:00PM and 2:00PM, and the evening meal usually takes place between 7:00PM and 8:30PM. In the cities, all kinds of food can be found, 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. **Please note: SIT will not have information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

You will be living with a Swiss or international family outside of Geneva in a small city, town, or village for the duration of the semester. Most of these communities are northeast of Geneva, between Nyon and Morges.

You and another student will share a homestay during the excursion to Morocco. The Morocco homestay will be located in the historic city of Rabat (Medina), within walking distance of the SIT Rabat center.

![A student with her homestay family](image)

**Other Accommodations**

Upon your arrival, you will stay for two nights at the youth hostel of Geneva, prior to your transfer to homestays.

During the ISP period, students generally continue to live with their homestay family. 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**

Although Geneva is an international place, the professional and social relationships between individuals are relatively formal. It is not considered polite to call immediate superiors or teachers by their first name unless being invited to do so. For example, when addressing professors or lecturers, as well as SIT staff members, students are expected to use the titles Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Men and women greet each other by shaking hands in both business and professional settings. When sitting in a classroom, resting area, or during dinner with homestay family, the student should sit squared and avoid negligent manners. Although laptops are allowed in classrooms, the use of mobile phones is strictly forbidden. Homestay families might be conservative with computer usage.

**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 basic room and board, based only 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.

Switzerland has an excellent banking system. In every city, it is easy to find banks to do all kinds of transactions, including cash withdrawal, changing currencies, and traveler checks. Banks are open on workdays between 9:00AM and 5:00PM, and some banks are also open on Saturday morning between 9:00AM and 12:00PM. It is always a good idea to bring some money in traveler’s checks, in case your credit card or ATM cards are stolen or lost.

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.

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

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.

Francs are the currency of Switzerland

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US$1800 to $2500**. 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 travel costs for your planned ISP or a specific personal expense.


Please budget approximately:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal spending (from past student suggestions)</td>
<td>$800 USD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Books, printing, supplies</td>
<td>$150 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-front medical costs</td>
<td>$350 USD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Typical Internet café usage</td>
<td>$10 USD/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential independent travel expenses</td>
<td>$350 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phone/ minutes</td>
<td>$200 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Expenses (paid in the US and Switzerland)</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>
</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 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 phone in Switzerland, which can be used to contact fellow students and potential ISP advisors. Visitors who wish to use a prepaid SIM card will be required to register with the service provider and produce identification.

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 cafés in Geneva for a small fee.

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

Student Name
c/o Association of World Learning in Switzerland
Chemin du Midi 8
1260 Nyon - VD
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.

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 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.

Please see the International Travel Policy document for more information regarding travel apart from the program’s regular itinerary.

Alumni Contact
If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor at 800-257-7751 or ask an alumni contact: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/.