

COVID-19 RISK MITIGATION PROTOCOLS for SIT PROGRAMS ABROAD

Updated on 9/21/20

I. INTRODUCTION

In light of COVID-19, and as part of SIT's consistent long-standing commitment to the safety, security and well-being of all faculty, staff, students and community partners, the School for International Training has adopted the following comprehensive policy for study abroad programming in 2021 and thereafter. While international travel and living abroad have always entailed certain risks, we recognize that these risks are heightened due to COVID-19 and the logistical restrictions related to it. Although these realities have necessitated a reduction of traditional study abroad possibilities in many locations, SIT's unique cohort-based experiential model enables us to continue to offer a diverse range of academically rigorous programs while simultaneously safeguarding the health and safety of our students and others associated with our institution.

This policy statement will explain the many efforts that SIT is actively undertaking to continue safely and responsibly to deliver high quality academic programs abroad. In addition to the existing emergency contingency plans which we have consistently maintained for each of our programs, individual SIT programs overseas now maintain a robust COVID-specific Risk Management Plan that is distinctively tailored to the host location and outlines protocols and mitigation measures to address risks posed by the pandemic.

II. RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

SIT relies on a variety of sources to derive best practices that inform the COVID-19 Risk Management Plan for each location where we maintain programs. The primary indices SIT considers regarding COVID-19 risk at the country level are 1) the U.S. Department of State (DOS) travel advisories, 2) the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) travel health notices, and 3) the International SOS COVID-19 impact scales. In addition, SIT closely examines:

- guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO), local health ministries and other relevant government agencies
- actions taken by national and local governments in our host locations abroad, such as movement restrictions or quarantine requirements that we must comply with and that can potentially impact the program
- the expertise and knowledge of our staff teams on the ground to guide the policies and procedures put forth in each program-specific COVID-19 Risk Management Plan

- proprietary information from International SOS (ISOS), our medical and travel security partner, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on health, security, and logistics

SIT maintains a Risk Management Team which actively monitors the health and safety situations on the ground in each of our host communities and works in collaboration with our local SIT colleagues. On a weekly or oftentimes daily basis, this team assesses the realities at each of our program centers to determine the viability and sustainability of operating programs there. If SIT determines that a particular program abroad cannot run during an upcoming academic term, whether because of COVID-19 or any other reason, affected students and their home institutions will be notified as early as possible to allow ample time for them to make alternative arrangements. Such announcements would generally be made about 1-3 months before the start of a program. Where possible, and with the approval of students' home institutions, affected students will be given the opportunity to transfer their enrollment to another SIT program that is operating and that will similarly align with their academic interests.

III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The protocols outlined in this plan are based on the following principles which represent the foundation of SIT's approach to addressing COVID-19 associated risks.

- a. SIT will always hold the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and community partners among our highest priorities.
- b. SIT will only commence a program in a particular location if we truly believe, according to all available facts and recommendations from appropriate public health entities in the host country, that we will be able to safely operate the program for its duration while maintaining its academic integrity.
- c. SIT will make decisions based on guidance from health professionals including the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and relevant public health agencies and organizations in our host countries.
- d. SIT will comply with laws and regulations set out by local and national authorities.
- e. SIT will provide the necessary training to stakeholders on the protocols in this plan and communicate any changes or updates promptly.

Understandably, there is no rigid, one-size-fits-all policy for COVID-19 and it is necessary for us to maintain evolving, location-specific protocols that speak to the shifting realities in the particular communities where we operate. This policy statement will be supplemented by details from each program site about individual program plans. When planning for an upcoming

experience abroad, we advise all students, families, and academic institutions to contact SIT with their questions and concerns. We are available to be a part of your planning process and to help you make decisions that best align with your needs.

IV. PLANS FOR SPRING 2021

For the upcoming Spring 2021 semester, key points of our plans include the following.

- a. Nearly all Spring 2021 programs will begin in-person on or after February 6th and finish by the end of May or early June, except for SIT's three programs in Switzerland that will begin in late-January or early-February.
 - o SIT does not currently plan to begin our programs remotely, though online launch phases could be incorporated into certain programs at select locations where the facts provided by appropriate public health authorities indicate that beginning the semester online is safest. If necessary, this program modification would be communicated to affected students in advance of the program start. If longer online engagement seems necessary, SIT will consult with students and their home institutions as those decisions are made.
- b. We plan to offer online pre-departure orientation sessions for each program during the weeks preceding the start of the semester to help orient, educate, and brief students on COVID-19 and our country-specific Risk Management Plans.
- c. Built into the start of the semester, all Spring 2021 programs will include a multi-day quarantine period at a controlled location. As has consistently been the case for all SIT programs, SIT will provide students with all meals and accommodations throughout the semester, including during the quarantine period.
 - o In accordance with public health guidelines in the host country, COVID-19 testing and temperature checks may be administered to each student during the quarantine, and at other times during the semester.
 - o During the quarantine period, our students will only be in contact with each other and a limited number of SIT program staff and will follow best practices for minimizing potential spread of illnesses.
 - o Students will use this time to begin program orientation sessions and courses.

- d. SIT will provide face masks and cleaning/sanitizing supplies for self-use at our program centers abroad and throughout the semester during all program-sponsored activities.
- e. Program-sponsored excursions around the host community will be undertaken using secure transportation methods which will adhere to advanced sanitation standards.
- f. An elevated level of cleanliness and sanitation will be maintained at all SIT program centers and classrooms, in accordance with local public health guidelines and requirements.
- g. Students who may display COVID-19 symptoms will be tested and will isolate while awaiting results. If the result is positive, the students will be able to continue their coursework from quarantine until such a time that an appropriate healthcare professional indicates that it is safe to rejoin the group. SIT program faculty and staff will continue to support students during quarantine period. Note: All SIT students outside of the U.S. are insured through CIGNA Global and have access to medical and security services through International SOS. For details, please see the Summary of Benefits and Summary of Coverage available on [SIT's website](#).
- h. Our existing [SIT Program Protection Policy](#) covers all students applying to our programs in the Spring 2021 semester. Under this policy, students have the flexibility to withdraw from an upcoming Spring 2021 program without risk of substantial financial loss for the program tuition and fees. Withdrawals can be made up until the day before the scheduled program start date. All students and families are advised to review the full policy on our website.
- i. Students, their families, and home institutions are encouraged to contact SIT if they require supplemental information pertaining to a specific country or host community.

V. BEST PRACTICES DURING STUDY ABROAD

Generally, the following best practices will be maintained on all SIT programs around the world. Recognizing that this is an evolving situation, these guidelines may be expanded or eased in the future in accordance with the instruction of relevant public health authorities in the host location together with the assessment of SIT's Risk Management Team.

Masks, Hand Sanitizing & Physical Distancing: Similar to the practices with which most of us are already familiar, students and SIT-affiliated persons will be advised, wherever possible, to maintain distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) between themselves and other people. Masks will be worn in all public spaces, classrooms, and common areas. Hand sanitizer and masks will be provided regularly by SIT to those who need them.

Classrooms & Learning Spaces: When and where possible, classes at SIT program centers abroad will make use of secure outdoor spaces where students can maintain the recommended physical distancing, and if conditions allow, in an open-air environment. SIT will make every effort to maintain physical distancing, sanitation, and reduce the potential risk of transmission. Site-specific measures will depend on local public health guidelines.

Meals: Students will receive all meals in secure settings that align with elevated sanitation standards and local and national public health guidelines.

Housing: While homestays with local families have always been an integral part of all SIT programs, we recognize that homestays in the present situation could expose students and our host communities to an elevated level of risk. Considering this, we inform students that homestay families might not be possible in certain locations during the Spring 2021 semester abroad. If it is determined that homestays will not be possible in a given location, we are prepared to house students in secure, single-room accommodations during the semester. Our on-site program staffs will plan to incorporate alternative cultural immersion activities with locals into the program schedule to facilitate other opportunities for intercultural awareness.

Pre-Departure Planning: Prior to students departing for their program location, the SIT Dean of Student Health, Safety & Well-Being and the academic director of the program will give virtual briefings to students about how to best prepare, tips to staying safe while traveling to the program location, updates on the situation on the ground and the protocols in place, and answer student questions and concerns.

In addition, SIT advises all students to self-isolate during the two weeks preceding their travels abroad to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 prior to their international air travel. As stated earlier, a quarantine period at a secure location with other SIT students and staff will then be built into the start of the program schedule upon their arrivals overseas.

Independent Travel & Visitors: Due to the academic rigor of the curriculum, SIT maintains a long-standing policy that disallows visitors during the semester and curtails both the frequency and locations of independent travel. During the present pandemic, we intend to maintain this policy for the added benefit of minimizing health risks. No outside visitors from students' home communities may come to visit with them at their program sites abroad. Furthermore, any requests for limited independent travel within the local region of the host country will only be considered if public health authorities in the host country indicate that such activity would be safe to pursue.

Program-sponsored Excursions: SIT programs will continue to include educational excursions to sites of academic relevance to our program theme. Travel will take place by way of secure transportation methods which adhere to elevated sanitation standards. Many program excursions will be modified to adapt to site-specific COVID realities. Excursions which planned to cross international borders may be replaced with in-country opportunities. Any modifications will be communicated to students as early as possible.

International Flights: As in the past, students are responsible for their own flights to and from their study abroad locations. SIT encourages students to purchase Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) insurance coverage for their international air travels. Such coverage can often be purchased through the airline and/or travel provider. Students should be sure to contact the CFAR travel insurance provider to ask questions and verify that it meets their needs.

Potential Escalation of COVID-19 in Host Country: Throughout the program, SIT will be closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation in each location and will be communicating with students and partners any changes that may occur. Each program's COVID-19 Risk Management Plan will specifically address what actions will take place if someone gets sick or conditions change to the point where it is no longer safe to run the program as planned. Depending on the local realities of each situation, different solutions may be applied including, but not limited to, temporarily isolating students and continuing classes online.

SIT International Honors Program (IHP): The multi-country structure of IHP programs means that distinct adjustments have been made for these itineraries. IHP programs in Spring 2021 will continue to comprehensively examine critical issues from a global comparative perspective but

will now visit two countries, with approximately 7-8 weeks spent in each of the two overseas locations. Students will be responsible for booking their own transportation to the first international site and from the second site to their home base. SIT will manage the group transportation between the two international sites.

Quarantine and COVID-19 testing, if necessary, will be administered upon arrival in each international destination, in accordance with local health guidelines. This new IHP format allows students to have longer periods of time for meaningful engagement in each of the two international host communities. Limiting the number of countries and flights on which students travel during the semester reduces health risks during COVID-19. Furthermore, the transportation-related fees for IHP programs will be reduced in Spring 2021, corresponding to the fewer flights.

Post-Program Planning: After the conclusion of their semester abroad, SIT advises all students to be tested for COVID-19 upon their return home and to remain in self-isolation until a negative test result is received. By limiting their contact with people upon their immediate return home, students will reduce the risk of potentially spreading illnesses to their home communities.