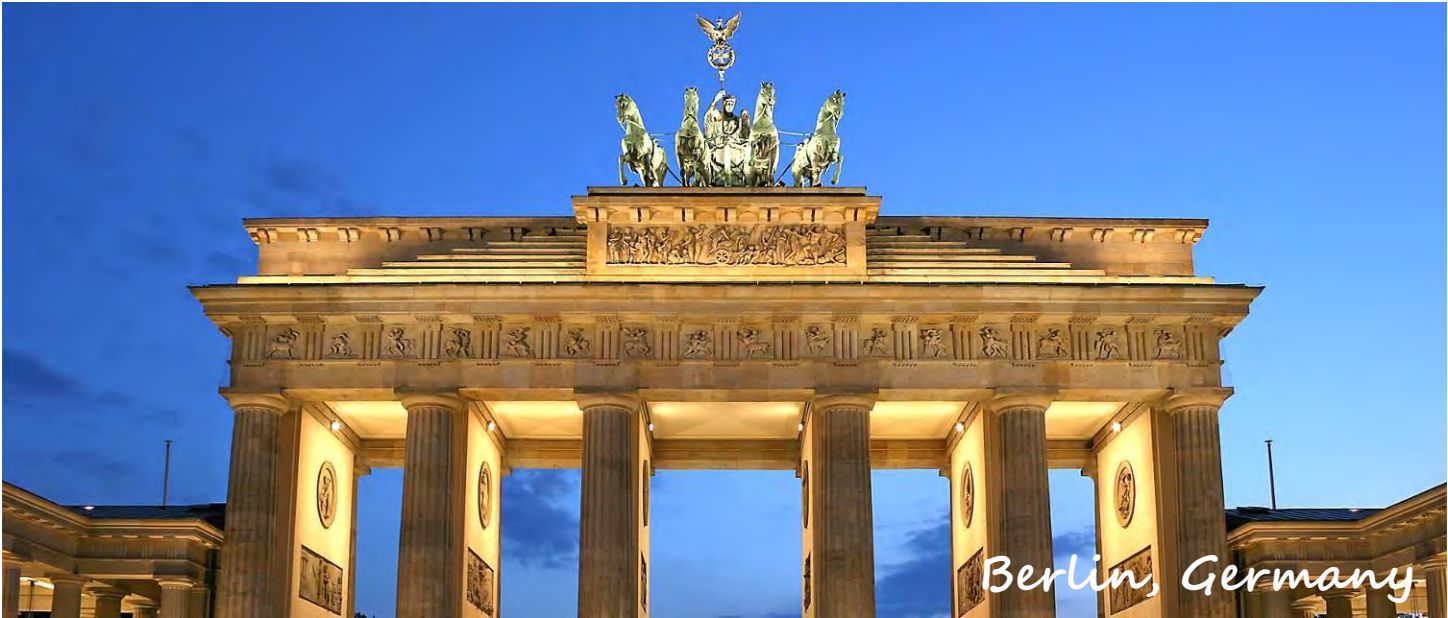




# BERLIN PREDEPARTURE HANDBOOK

WCCCSA BERLIN  
SPRING 2018





**WELCOME!**

To help you prepare for your upcoming study abroad experience we have put together this handbook to answer some of your questions about the program and life in Berlin. We recommend that you do the following:

- Read all the information thoroughly.
- Refer to all websites cited in the handbook.
- Take the handbook with you when you travel.

If your questions are not answered by the handbook then please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Your Program Manager**  
**Jessica Lees**  
 American Institute for Foreign Study  
 Dilke House, 1 Malet Street  
 London WC1E 7JN  
 Tel: +44 0207 636 0761  
**E-mail:** [jlees@aifs.co.uk](mailto:jlees@aifs.co.uk)

*Jessica is your main point of contact and coordinates all pre-departure program aspects.*

**Your Program Coordinator Abroad**  
**American Institute for Foreign Study**  
 Tel: 0176 2333 1584  
 Emergency cell phone: (011 49) 176 2255 2496  
**E-mail:** [germany@aifs.co.uk](mailto:germany@aifs.co.uk)

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

BEFORE YOU GO!..... 2

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION..... 2

PREPARING TO LEAVE ..... 3

ITINERARY..... 3

PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION ..... 3

WHAT TO BRING..... 3

BAGGAGE INFORMATION ..... 4

MEDICAL AND MEDICATION ..... 4

ON LOCATION..... 5

TRAVEL TO BERLIN ..... 5

LIFE IN BERLIN ..... 6

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION ..... 8

TRAVELING ..... 9

COMMUNICATIONS ABROAD..... 10

MONEY MATTERS..... 11

HEALTH AND SAFETY WHILE ABROAD..... 13

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION..... 15

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE ..... 16

PACKING LIST..... 17

## BEFORE YOU GO!

### To do list:

- Please read all the information and documents on your online student portal:  
[www.aifscustomized.com](http://www.aifscustomized.com)
- Apply for or renew your passport if necessary
- Apply for a visa if necessary
- See your physician and complete the Medical Exam Form (see page 4)
- Visit the U.S. Department of State's website for students going abroad:  
<http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>
- Sign up for The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). It is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens/nationals who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country:  
<https://step.state.gov/step/>
- Download the CISI mobile app at:  
[www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp)
- Order enough medication to last the entire stay abroad
- Consult your airline's baggage allowance guidelines
- Start planning what to pack
- Buy a useful guidebook
- Notify your bank if you are planning to use your bank card abroad
- Contact your cell phone provider for information about using your cell abroad (see the Communications Abroad section)
- Give the contact details or a copy of this handbook to your guardians
- Read some student blogs and posts about the place you are visiting: <http://blog.aifsabroad.com/> (see Share Your Experience)



### EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

AIFS is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the duration of your program in both the U.S. and on campus. If a crisis arises and your family needs to contact you or if you need to reach AIFS staff yourself in an emergency situation, use these numbers:

#### Emergency number in U.S.

1-800-727-2437 from U.S.

1-203-399-5000 from outside the U.S.

During non-business hours, you will be connected to the AIFS Emergency Answering Service. Please use this Emergency Answering Service only in a true emergency.

#### Emergency numbers in Germany

0176 2255 24 96 (if calling from a German phone inside Germany)

011 49 176 2255 24 96 (if calling from U.S. or with American phone).

#### Medical or security related emergency

In case of medical or security related emergency, students should call AXA Assistance on:

AXA Assistance on:

**(855) 327-1411** (calling toll-free from within the US)

**(312) 935-1703** (calling from outside of the US, collect calls accepted)

Please quote: Policy **GLM N04983117**

Always remember to inform the staff first about your sickness and to collect the insurance form from the office before going to the doctor.

#### Emergency services in Germany:

Ambulance: 112

Fire: 112

Police/Emergency: 110

#### U.S. Embassy

U.S. Embassy in Germany 0049 30 83050

Details of U.S. Embassies, Consulates and Diplomatic Missions and their emergency services:

[www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov)

# PREPARING TO LEAVE

## Your Program Manager is

### Jessica Lees

American Institute for Foreign Study

Dilke House, 1 Malet Street

London WC1E 7JN

Tel: +44 0207 636 0761

E-mail: [jlees@aifs.co.uk](mailto:jlees@aifs.co.uk)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

---

### Useful websites

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/germany/berlin/>

<http://www.berlin.de/english/>

<http://www.berlingermany.co.uk/>

## WHAT TO BRING

---

### Pack lightly!

Bring as little as you possibly can. Try not to bring more than one suitcase and one weekend bag. If you bring heavy luggage you will regret it. For the first few days, you will have to carry everything you pack through airports, on buses, up flights of stairs, etc. Do not pack more than you can easily carry. We cannot stress this enough.

AIFS strongly suggests that students leave any valuables and large sums of cash at home. Students are responsible for their personal belongings for the duration of their program.

You can pack whatever type of clothing you feel most comfortable in, just be practical. Stick with basics that can be paired together to create several outfits.

Luggage sometimes gets delayed or lost so as a precaution, AIFS recommends that you pack a carry-on bag with anything you might need in case your luggage is lost e.g. a change of clothes, medicines, basic toiletries.

Start planning what you will pack by reading this handbook, checking your baggage allowance, the local climate and the packing list at the end of this handbook. The weather and climate can be checked here:

[weather-and-climate.com/](http://weather-and-climate.com/)

### Linens

Linens, blankets, pillows and towels are provided.

### Course Supplies

Bring a good German dictionary with you or download a dictionary app to your phone or tablet.

## ITINERARY

---

You will also be sent a more detailed itinerary nearer the start of the program.

## PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION

---

### Passports

All students are required to have a valid passport to participate in a study abroad program. For information about obtaining a new passport or renewing an existing passport, please visit the U.S. Department of State's website at: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

If you have not yet applied for your passport, please do so using the expedited service. To check on the status of a passport application, please call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778.

If possible, also get an ID card, that way you do not need to carry your passport with you except for travelling. Driver's licenses are not valid IDs in Europe.

### Visas

U.S. citizens do not need to apply for a visa before traveling to Germany and can enter Europe on a 90-day "tourist visit" which is provided on arrival in Germany. AIFS staff will then assist students in applying for a student visa.

If you are a non-U.S. citizen you may need to apply for a Type - D national visa before traveling to Germany. Please contact the AIFS Admissions Officer for further information. Non-U.S. citizens are responsible for obtaining a visa as required.

## BAGGAGE INFORMATION

---

### Baggage Allowances

International airline carriers expect passengers to adhere to their baggage allowance for transatlantic flights. Airlines often charge a penalty fee for overweight or excess baggage. The fees vary from airline to airline, and in some cases airlines will refuse to take excess pieces or overweight luggage.

Please contact your airline directly for information regarding luggage restrictions and baggage allowances. As baggage allowance policies are set by the airlines and not by AIFS, AIFS accepts no responsibility for changes in airline luggage policy and does not pay for extra/overweight baggage fees under any circumstances.

Most intercontinental airlines also allow one standard size carry-on and one small accessory which can be a small purse, laptop bag or camera bag.

Remember that:

- Baggage allowances for flights within Europe are often more restrictive than trans-Atlantic flights
- When connecting from trans-Atlantic to intra-European flights or flights within other countries, you are subject to other carrier's baggage allowance restrictions as well
- Airline carriers can alter baggage allowance policies without notice
- Overweight baggage fees are determined by the airline and are solely your responsibility

### Baggage insurance

Personal effects are covered up to \$3,000 with a \$50 deductible. Some exclusions apply. Refer to the insurance policy for further details.

## MEDICAL AND MEDICATION

---

Students are required to have a medical exam and have their physician complete a Medical Exam form. This form is available on your AIFS account online:

[www.aifscustomized.com](http://www.aifscustomized.com)

In addition, make sure your childhood immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria-tetanus, etc.) are up-to-date.

If you take **prescription medications** on a regular basis you should remember to:

- Carry a note from your doctor stating your medical condition, the purpose of the medication, dosage information and the brand and generic names of the medication. This is especially necessary if you will be carrying insulin, syringes or narcotics.
- Keep all medications in their original containers with your name clearly printed on the labels.
- Pack all prescription medication in your carry-on luggage in case your packed luggage is lost or delayed during the flight.
- Bring enough of your medication to last your entire stay abroad. Prescriptions written in the U.S. cannot be filled in elsewhere. Getting a local doctor abroad to prescribe you the medication is a long and expensive process.
- Do not ask anyone to send you prescription drugs, vitamins, contact lenses and cosmetics. Due to customs restrictions, medication cannot be shipped overseas.

### Toiletries

You will be able to buy all your health and beauty aids abroad, you just might not find your favorite brands. Bring the basics you use every day in travel-sized containers.

Prepare a medical kit with your favorite over-the-counter pain reliever, cold medication, vitamins, etc., which also may not be available abroad.

For contact lens users, bring a supply of all the necessary solutions for the duration of the program. They cost several times more than what you pay for them in the U.S.

Please note that due to restrictions in the amounts of liquids allowed on carry-on luggage on some airlines, you should pack liquids in the checked luggage.

## ON LOCATION

### Your Program Coordinator



**Nele Thomsen**  
American Institute for Foreign  
Study  
**Tel:** 0176 2333 1584  
**Emergency phone:**  
0176 2255 24 96 (from Germany)  
011 49 176 2255 24 96 (from U.S.)  
**E-mail:** [germany@aifs.co.uk](mailto:germany@aifs.co.uk)

*Moin Moin und Hallo! Welcome to Berlin. I am from Hamburg originally, but have lived in Berlin for over 15 years now. I studied History, Art History and English in Berlin and Potsdam and have worked as a tour guide in Potsdam. I enjoy showing students around Berlin; making sure they experience Berlin as a local while not missing out on the important sights.*

*I love the ever-changing way of the city, its vibrancy and the laid-back attitude. Berlin has something to offer for everyone from museums, to clubs or historical sites like the Berlin Wall. And not far away you'll find Potsdam and Dresden, with their palaces and gardens, former residences of Kings and Emperors.*

*I look forward to meeting you in Berlin!*

### TRAVEL TO BERLIN

#### Arriving in Berlin independently “Own Travel”

**Students making their own flight arrangements must fill out the form on their AIFS account online and return it to the address given.**

If you are making your own travel arrangements you must arrange your flights according to the dates listed on the AIFS website for this program:

[https://www.aifscustomized.com/wccsa/berlin\\_spring/#](https://www.aifscustomized.com/wccsa/berlin_spring/#)

Please remember the time difference when you book your flights. You must allow enough time to travel and must take into account the local time at your destination. Check your flight arrival date and time before booking.

Please let your Program Manager [jlees@aifs.co.uk](mailto:jlees@aifs.co.uk) know your flight itinerary as soon as possible.

Own travel students will need to make their own way to the group accommodation:

#### Flotwell Hotel and Residence

Flotwellstraße 18,  
10785 Berlin, Germany

Do not worry. If you have any difficulties getting to the apartments, you will find that people are very helpful and that most people speak English.

If you arrive in Berlin before the start of the program you will have to make your own arrangements to stay at a hotel or hostel.

**If you are traveling independently you should have at least €150 with you in cash to cover costs or emergencies.**

If your flight has been delayed, please contact AIFS staff in the U.S. prior to take off by calling 1-800-727-2437. Staff in Berlin will be informed and will know when to expect you.

#### Lost or delayed luggage

If your luggage has been lost or delayed, do not leave the baggage reclaim area without filing a lost luggage report with the airline.

Make sure you are given a reference and contact number for your claim.

When filling in a claim form in the baggage arrival you should give your apartment address. The luggage will then be delivered there.

AIFS recommends that you pack a carry-on bag with anything you might need for the first day in case your luggage is delayed.

## LIFE IN BERLIN

---

### Time

German time is 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time; Germany is 6 hours ahead of EST and 9 hours ahead of PST.

### Climate

Berlin has a moderate climate with pleasant weather. It is a city with four distinct seasons. It is at similar latitude to Seattle and the northern tip of Maine.

Spring time can still be quite a chilly season in Germany so you need to be ready for colder weather and rain, maybe even snow! Please remember that you will be doing your fair share of exploring out in the city so come prepared!

### Language

The official language is German and German language study is part of your German Life and Culture class. No previous German language study is required.

### Orientation

You will receive detailed program information at orientation where you will receive information about life in Berlin, academic matters and social activities. Students will be able to ask questions about any of their concerns.



## CULTURE SHOCK

---

Studying abroad can be a wonderfully exciting, rewarding, culturally enlightening and expanding experience. However it can, at times, also be a stressful experience.

You will encounter many new and sometimes confusing situations while studying abroad. Culture shock is a type of stress that results from trying to cope with these situations, maybe using a different language and following different customs. Culture shock can be defined as a clash between our own views of the world (which are determined by our home culture) and our new cultural environment. It can feel like you have a lack of control and that you are helpless in this new culture.

Almost every traveler who spends an extended period away from home experiences culture shock to some degree. You are outside of your comfort zone and as a result, you may feel frustrated, depressed or even sick.

Culture shock is also often described as an adjustment cycle, initially you feel really excited and optimistic about going to study abroad, and can't wait to get to the country you will be calling home for the next semester. This is the high point of the cycle or, what is often referred to as the 'honeymoon stage'. Then you may hit the second phase or the low point of the cycle, 'the crisis stage' where you may see all the differences and may begin to miss the support system and familiarity of home.

Culture shock is about the struggle to become culturally competent in a different culture. It is perfectly natural, and it can help you to learn and grow from the experience. As it is a developmental process, how long and how you work through it depends on what resources you have available. Some individuals will seem to have no problems adjusting whilst for others it can be a real struggle.

There is a similar adjustment required when returning home, referred to as reverse culture shock or re-entry shock. It relates to the process of readjusting, re-aculturating and reassimilating into one's home culture after living in another culture. Expect to take time to adjust to home life again when you get back home.

Most of the stress-causing differences between home and the host culture will be obvious to you right away: disruption of your normal daily routine, the distance between you and family and friends, new food, different language, the climate, etc. Other differences between your culture and the host culture are not so obvious but can also cause stress. This can include how people make decisions and resolve problems, interaction with your professors, how recreational time is spent, customer service and business practices, and the type of body language people use. Getting used to all this can cause a considerable amount of anxiety.

If you go abroad expecting everything to be a certain way you will be disappointed. Keep an open mind and expect the unexpected. Everything about your daily routine is about to change from the educational system to what time you will eat dinner. Be flexible and open to new things. Remember that one of the main reasons for study abroad for most students is to integrate into the culture. You can't integrate if you expect everything to be like it is at home.

Since everyone handles things differently, there is no "formula" for dealing with culture shock. The way you deal with it will be different from others but there are things that you can do that will make the adjustment easier. It does

help to know that it happens to everyone in one way or another. Knowing that you may experience it at some point during your stay abroad, you can take some positive steps to prepare yourself:

- Accept the differences. In order to acclimate you are going to have to find a way to live with the things that you are not in 100% agreement with about the new culture. This goes for the host country's attitude towards punctuality and customer service, the food and the educational system. These are some of the things that make up the culture and they are not going to change because you don't like them.
- Be patient. You are not going to get used to living abroad in a couple of days or even a couple of weeks. Adjustment takes time.
- Keep an open mind. Relax and accept things as they are. You might end up appreciating the host culture's way of doing things or at least develop an appreciation for how things are done at home.
- Pay attention to cultural differences. Social customs vary widely from one culture to another and there is no way to "fit in" until you learn what is (and is not) appropriate behavior. You will learn this by paying attention to the actions of those around you.
- Make good use of your free time. Maybe you were used to a rigid schedule at home and you are having a hard time adjusting to a slower pace. See as much of the city and country as you can. You may never have the chance to relax this much again so enjoy it.
- Get some exercise. If you are used to exercising at home keep it up while you are abroad. Exercise will help you battle culture shock in a constructive way. Go for a run or join a gym.



## Electricity

American appliances run on 110 volts and most of Europe uses 220 volts. You can buy transformers to convert the electricity and adapter kits for the different sockets at your local hardware store before you leave. However, we suggest that you do not bring items such as hairdryers, curling irons, hair straighteners, electrical razors etc. The electrical current abroad is so great that if you try to use them, even with an adapter/converter, they may explode, short out, melt or cause a fire. Adapters are really made for occasional, not daily use so you are better off just buying these items abroad. Remember you always have the option to share these purchases with your roommate(s).

Generally most tech items such as laptop/tablet, cell phones, and cameras come with dual voltage converter built in. You should be able to use these items with a plug adapter. Always be sure to check with the manufacturer before using items abroad.

## Food

After music and art, Germans take food, especially coffee and pastries, very seriously. Berlin is dotted with cafés where you can linger over coffee, especially Italian types.



You might want to try a "Currywurst" (sausage with curry ketchup) and of course some of the Turkish dishes such as the "Döner Kebap" provided by the many Turkish places all over town. Germans eat the "Wiener Schnitzel" (Viennese fillet of veal or pork) amongst other heavy meat dishes like dumplings with goose and red cabbage, for example.

The German breakfast—usually continental—consists of fresh rolls, marmalade, butter, honey and coffee. Many Germans like to meet for breakfast, and brunch on Saturdays and Sundays are very popular. Lunch is usually warm and considered the main meal, while dinner is usually a cold snack of bread, salad, sausage and cold cuts.





There are many vegetarian restaurants in Berlin as well as restaurants and stores which cater to special dietary needs. Being vegetarian or vegan is not a problem in Berlin and the university also offers multiple options to choose from daily.

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

---

Public transportation is very efficient and convenient. Any part of town can be reached easily. There is the subway, citytrain (S-Bahn), tram and bus. You can use one ticket for all of them. Students receive a transportation pass for the duration of the program this makes travel to and from classes easy and flexible.

### Buses/S-Bahn/Subway/Tram

The transportation system is easy, economical and environmentally friendly. Buses, S-Bahn, subway and trams run frequently throughout the city from 5 a.m. to midnight, daily. After midnight there are night buses and on weekends, buses, S-Bahn, subway and trams run all night long.

### Taxis

Taxis have designated stops throughout the city, and they can also be ordered by phone or via an app (the number is 81 11). Taxis in Berlin can be trusted not to overcharge their passengers. Additional charges are approximately 70 cents for night service and approximately €1 per piece of luggage.

### Walking

Within the city center walking is possible – outside you will find distances hard to manage by foot as the city is very much spread out.

### Biking

The advantages of getting around by bike have long since been appreciated in Berlin. There is a well-developed network of cycle-paths and as Berlin is so flat, biking can be quite a pleasure!

## Train

Berlin Central Railway Station is a 15-minute walk from the city center. Eurocity, Intercity and International Express Trains connect Berlin to all major cities in Europe.



## Traveling

---

During your Study Abroad Program you may have free weekends during which you can travel. To make the most of your opportunity, it is a good idea to do some research before the program starts. When you arrive, AIFS staff will give you plenty of advice and assistance.

### Air

Over the last decade or so there has been a revolution in cheap air travel throughout Europe. Please be aware that there are 2 airports in Berlin (Tegel & Schönefeld) allowing you to get almost anywhere in Europe at reasonable prices. The key to getting cheap deals is being flexible about departure times and booking as early as possible. Ryanair ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)), EasyJet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)), and Germanwings ([www.germanwings.com](http://www.germanwings.com)) are three of the most popular budget airlines, but keep an eye on the details. If you want to compare fares and options it's also worth checking out Skyscanner ([www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net)). As you will soon begin to see many popular European destinations (like Berlin) will have 2 operating airports, in most cases the cheaper airlines will fly in to the airport that is further from the destination city.

Skyscanner ([www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net)) is a handy website for checking out different flight options.

When booking with a budget airline, be aware that...

1. The cheapest flight times are usually first thing in the morning or last thing at night when it can be expensive or inconvenient to get to the airport in time. Check your route to and from the airport before you book the flight.

2. There are often extra charges for online check-in, checked baggage, early boarding, insurance, credit card processing fees etc. Pay attention to what you're opting into and out of- the cheap fare might not stay cheap for very long with all the extras.

3. Airports described as Paris (Beauvais) or Barcelona (Girona), for example, may not be that close to the city. (Beauvais is 90 minutes Paris; Girona is 1hr from Barcelona).

### Train

Across Europe, the train is a great way of travelling; not as quick as the plane but in the current climate, certainly more relaxed, with no luggage restrictions or excessive security. For the cheapest deals, book in advance and try to avoid travelling on a Friday. In Germany, you can look at [www.bahn.com](http://www.bahn.com) to find details and prices of trains. You can sometimes find really great deals on train travel if you travel as a small group in Germany. This is to encourage more people to use the trains rather than buses or planes so always check out the price as an individual but also as a group of 3 or 4...it may be significantly cheaper to travel as a group!

A good starting point for further train travel in Europe is [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com); it has all the details on Eurail passes, which students have often used for post program travel. Once again, you would have to do quite a bit of travel to get full value.

A Eurail pass allows you to book a set number of days of train travel throughout certain countries. Full details at [www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com). Passes can only be delivered to a US address.

Think carefully before buying a multi-day pass, they are more suited for long term travel (post-program), not occasional weekend use. Even with a pass you are still required to pay a seat reservation fee on many trains.

### Bus

The cheapest way to get around Europe is often by using the coach. Be warned that it will take a while and might not be the most comfortable way to travel but you will get there....eventually!! Coach trips can be fun and a real cross country adventure and are always made more bearable by having great company!

The Germany coach network is Berlin Linien ([www.berlinlinienbus.de](http://www.berlinlinienbus.de)) In Europe, it's Eurolines ([www.eurolines.com](http://www.eurolines.com)).

You can find great deals on Eurolines if you look often enough...at certain times of the year you can get a return

ticket from Berlin to Prague, which takes 4 hours each way, for about €70! Not bad! All the coaches have a small bathroom, make regular stops and it can be a good opportunity to meet some interesting people! They also pick up and drop off right in the heart of the city.

### Where to stay?

**Hostels** – Don't be afraid of staying in a hostel. Modern hostels are clean and comfortable and are great places for getting tourist information and meeting people. Many hostels also have the option of a private room with bathroom. Take a look at [www.hostelworld.com](http://www.hostelworld.com) for more information, photos and guest reviews.

**Hotels** - There are a variety of hotels and guest houses across Europe. Rooms are much smaller than in the U.S, rarely have air conditioning and if they are booked for two people that is the maximum number allowed.

Prices vary hugely depending on location and season. Be aware of Easter and local holidays that will push up prices. Often rooms will come with breakfast included. Check previous guest reviews on [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com) and use an online map so you know exactly where it is located. Good places to start looking for hotels are [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com) and [www.trivago.com](http://www.trivago.com).

**Apartments** - When traveling in a group, a private apartment could be an ideal option. Check out [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com) or [www.vrbo.com](http://www.vrbo.com) and read previous reviews carefully.

### International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

In order to prove you are a student whilst in Europe, it might be worth getting an International Student Identity Card. These are usually cheaper to purchase in Europe (€10) and are available at numerous places in Berlin.

The cards are recognized all across Europe, providing discounts at hostels, movie theatres, museum entrances etc. [www.isiccard.com](http://www.isiccard.com)



## COMMUNICATIONS ABROAD

---

Keeping in touch with friends and family back home is very important and luckily it is easier than ever.

### Mail

In Berlin, your mailing address will be:

Your Name c/o AIFS  
Flottwell Hotel and Residence  
Flottwellstraße 18,  
10785 Berlin, Germany

Please remember that regular mail to or from the U.S. can take a long while to reach its destination. Letters and packages may arrive after you have left the program. AIFS is not responsible for returning any mail and packages.

Due to customs regulations you are likely to have to pay a customs tax if you are sent a parcel while abroad. Once students are on campus they are surprised to discover the paperwork, faxes, phone calls and cost necessary to clear the packages sent to them and the delay entailed. It is a bureaucratic and time-consuming process to have packages unreleased from customs. Many documents including original invoices for the items shipped may be required by customs. Unfortunately AIFS staff cannot do anything to help you with these procedures and cannot predict the cost of the custom fees.

If people from home want to send you a care package they must declare the contents as "used goods for personal use only". They cannot send something new and declare it as used goods as customs often open packages to check the contents. Please try to deter people at home from sending you packages incorrectly labeled as used goods as they will be held up at customs, require time-consuming paperwork to get released and are often heavily taxed and therefore costly to recover. We cannot stress this advice enough.

If you must send or receive important items, FedEx or UPS should be used as they are safer and quicker and can be tracked.

Please do not ask anyone to send prescription drugs, vitamins, contact lenses, cosmetics and food or anything that could be mistaken for these items. Due to customs restrictions, these items cannot be shipped overseas.

In general, we advise you not to ask people to send mail to you especially near the end of the program or if you are on one of our shorter programs.

### Making and receiving telephone calls

To call abroad you require the country code and the area code of where you are calling and the exit code of where

you are calling from. Instructions on calling the U.S. will be covered during orientation at the start of the program.

The exit code for the U.S. is 011

The exit code for Germany is 00

The country code for the U.S. is 1

The country code for Germany is 49

The area code for Berlin is 30

- To call Germany from the U.S. dial: 011 (exit code) +49 + local number (without the "0" at the beginning)
- To call the U.S. from Germany dial: 00 (exit code) +1 (country code) + area code + number

In general, phone calls are much more expensive than in the U.S. We strongly recommend that you use a local pre-paid phone card whenever possible for your calls. We do not recommend that you purchase phone cards in the U.S. for use in Europe. In the past students who have done so have found either the phone cards do not work or the minutes promised are for long-distance calls within the U.S. and that a call from Europe to the U.S. will consume the card allowance in significantly less time.

### Cell phones

If you are planning on bringing your Smartphone, please remember these points:

- Make sure it is insured.
- Contact your US cell service provider before departure to check that you can use it abroad.
- Check the prices for calls, texts and data.
- Decide if you want a data roaming package.
- Know how to turn off data roaming on your phone to use it with free Wi-Fi when available.

Some students purchase a cheap cell phone once they get abroad. Most work on a pay-as-you-go basis with pre-paid minutes and this may be the cheapest way to make local calls while abroad. The Program Coordinator will be able to advise you.

Another choice is to purchase a SIM card abroad to use in a US cell phone, provided that your phone is unlocked and compatible. Check with your cell service provider before you leave. The main providers of SIM cards often have offers so please ask and check with AIFS Staff before making your purchase.

### Internet and Computers

The internet is the main way students keep in contact with friends, family and staff by using Email, Facebook, Twitter and Skype. We advise using Wi-Fi based services for the majority of your communication.

Many places will have wireless internet access free of charge but remember it can be slower and less reliable than in the USA and any illegal streaming and downloading will not be tolerated.

We advise students bring a laptop or tablet and smartphone as they will be useful for studying as well as good for communicating with staff, other students and family back home. It is important to note that you are responsible for your own laptop and its safekeeping. For this reason it is always a good idea to check the program insurance policy regarding the personal effects coverage and the related limits to make sure you have enough coverage for any personal property such as laptops.

**Free Ways to Keep in Touch**

There are lots of free ways of connecting with friends and family and many free apps available that allow you to message, call or video call friends and family back home. Some examples are Skype, Viber, and WhatsApp. Just be sure to research options before you go abroad. All require an internet connection, and the quality of your call can vary greatly depending on signal strength. If you plan on using a new method to keep in touch, we advise doing a test run before you depart.

Don't forget the time difference between the USA and where you are studying and please be considerate to your roommates.



**MONEY MATTERS**

During your studying abroad experience, it is an unavoidable fact that you will need access to funds.

The cost of the AIFS program is fairly comprehensive. However, in order to ensure that you budget your personal spending money correctly, it is vital that you understand precisely what is covered in the program cost and what your own responsibility is. Check this before you depart!

There are a number of cultural calendar events offered by AIFS and certainly enough to do in Berlin to keep you occupied the whole time here, but some students do want

to travel to other parts of Europe and for this you will need more money.

**Please note** - you should notify your bank before you leave the U.S. so they know you will be withdrawing foreign currencies and that you are planning to use your bank card abroad.

**Currency**

Many countries in Europe including Germany use the Euro as their form of currency. Students should check the current exchange rates before they depart on the AIFS program. You can check here for current exchange rates: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)

You should pay attention to exchange rates while you are abroad as some will change day to day.

Before you leave we recommend that you check to see if your bank has a relationship with any banks abroad which might save you some money in withdrawal fees. You should find out what transaction fees your bank will charge in the U.S. These vary depending on your bank and can be an unwelcome surprise.

It's worth taking time to familiarize yourself with the currency before arrival, checking out the new coins and banknotes.

It is a good idea to have some currency with you upon your arrival. You do not want to go out searching for a bank immediately. Don't carry around large sums of cash because if it is lost or stolen there is no way to replace it and it is not covered by insurance.

Don't take lots of dollars with you as many places will not change them and those that do tend to charge high commission rates. If family and friends give you money as a gift before departing, put it into your bank account and access it through the ATM when you need it.

**Local prices**

**FOOD/DRINKS**

Coffee.....	2.50 – 3.00 €
Roll.....	0.50 €
Sandwich and a drink.....	5.00 €
Main course in modest restaurant.....	7 – 12.00 €
Mineral water in restaurant (very small bottle).....	2.50 €
Coca Cola in restaurant (very small bottle).....	2.50 €
Pastry/cake in restaurant .....	3.50 €

**CLOTHING**

Generic jeans .....	from 25 €
Pair of shoes .....	from 40 €

**MISCELLANEOUS**

Haircut (men) .....	from 10 €
---------------------	-----------

Haircut (women).....	from 12 €
Movie ticket.....	5 – 10 €
Used bike.....	100 – 300 €
New bike.....	from 400 €
Batteries (simple ones) .....	4 €
Local transportation.....	see page 9
Laundry .....	5 €
Basic cooking utensils.....	not necessary
Postcard/letter to U.S.A. (postage) .....	0.80 €

#### TOILETRIES

Toothpaste.....	from 0.70 €
Shampoo.....	from 1.50 €
Gillette Blue II Plus .....	approx. 3 €
Shaving Foam (200ml) .....	approx. 3 – 4 €
Body Lotion (250mls) .....	5 €
Pantene 2-in-1 (200m) .....	3 €
Tampax (and other brands) .....	4 €/ 25
Shower Wash (250ml) .....	2 €

#### ACADEMIC

Class materials.....	notebook: 2 € pen: 1 €
Text books.....	not necessary
Field trips.....	mostly covered in program
Dictionary.....	from 15 €

#### ATM cards

In almost all cases your US debit cards can access money from the ATMs of most banks abroad but remember that you need a PIN to use the card. If you fail to have this number for your card you won't be able to use it. Make sure you contact your bank prior to departure to get your four-digit PIN. Also without warning they may fail to work so they should not be relied on as the sole means of acquiring money. Students should contact their banks about withdrawing foreign currencies from their U.S. accounts. If you make an ATM withdrawal overseas it is a good idea to check your statement online and see exactly how much it is costing you in U.S. dollars. Your Program Coordinator will be able to provide you with reputable convenient ATM locations.

#### Credit cards

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. The most recognized cards are Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Visa is the most widely accepted. You can take a cash advance from your credit cards if you have a PIN, but in general, they should be used only in an emergency, as interest rates are very high.

Please keep in mind that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially US style cards where you have to sign for your purchase. Always check if a business

accepts your credit card before making a purchase. Many places have a minimum spend if paying by card. Please also have some photo ID as you may be asked for it at the time of payment.

Keep in mind that in order to use your credit card you must have a PIN number. You can get this by contacting your credit card company.

#### Banking

It is very important that you contact your bank and inform them when and where you will be overseas, otherwise they may block your account when they see purchases abroad and getting them unblocked can be frustrating and will take time.

You will only be able to access money from your checking account so please make sure that you transfer funds into this account.

Please keep your cards extra safe whilst abroad. If they are lost it can be a complicated procedure to get them replaced. In most cases your bank will only send replacement cards to your American address, not your overseas address, so you could be left without cards for a while.

If your bank account has an online banking capability, it's a good idea to sign up for that service, so that you can see any transaction fees your bank is charging, the rate of exchange and generally manage your money more effectively.

You will not be able to open bank accounts during your stay abroad.

#### Pre-paid travel cards

A very good back up to a regular bank account are pre-paid cards, e.g. [usa.visa.com](http://usa.visa.com), [Cash Passport](#), or [FairFX](#). They are available in the U.S before departure and can be pre-loaded and re-loaded at any time. They work in the same way as regular debit cards by using a PIN for withdrawals and transactions. They are a secure way of using money overseas and in the event that the pre-paid card is lost or stolen it can be replaced quickly.

These have in the main replaced paper travelers' checks which are no longer commonly used.

#### Personal checks

Unless you have an American Express card and have made prior arrangements with American Express (Express Cash), you will not be able to cash personal checks.

#### Wiring money

The fastest way to get money transferred to you while you are abroad is through [Money Gram](#) or [Western Union](#).

[Money in Minutes](#). This can be done at any Western Union or Money Gram office or online with a credit or debit card. Please bear in mind that it is expensive to send money this way, so it should only really be used in emergency situations. However, there is no charge to receive funds; all you need is some ID and the reference number (given to the sender of the money) to pick up the money anywhere in the world.

The Program Coordinator will be able to give you the address of the nearest Western Union office should you need it.

### Tipping

Finally, let's talk tipping. As a rule we don't tip excessively in Europe. It's just a cultural difference. Most people employed in the service industry are paid a reasonable wage, therefore, Europeans only tip if they have received good service. You are not expected to tip in bars or taxis in Germany.



## HEALTH AND SAFETY WHILE ABROAD

While a study abroad experience is usually an extremely safe one, it is important to remember basic safety precautions that anyone should take when in an unfamiliar environment.

### Safety Guidelines

AIFS provides detailed security briefings to students when they arrive and these measures should be followed at all times:

- Sign up for The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) before you depart. It is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens/nationals who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. It will allow you to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate: <https://step.state.gov/step/>
- Login to [www.mycisi.com](http://www.mycisi.com) Cultural Insurance Services International. It provides information about your insurance plan and helps with any security and medical issues.
- Download the CISI mobile app at: [www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/students/technology.asp)

You can access your travel insurance documents, view country-specific travel alerts, personal security assistance information, search medical providers worldwide and much more.

- In the event of an emergency you should check-in using the app so that others will know you are safe or if you need assistance.
- In case of medical or security related emergency please contact our 24/7 emergency assistance provider, AXA Assistance. The details can be found on page 2.
- Leave people at home with a copy of your itinerary and handbook with all the contact and emergency details. Also leave copies of your passport and insurance details. Let them know your new cell number as soon as possible if you change it while abroad.
- Be sure to have personal identification with you at all times with the address and telephone number of your school, the AIFS office, the AXA Assistance details and the International Emergency Number. We suggest you memorize the address of your accommodation.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport and take special care to keep the original in a safe place.
- Do not advertise the fact that you are American by, for example, wearing your US College sweatshirt/baseball cap and avoid obviously American hangouts.
- Stay in touch regularly with your family. Parents can get worried.
- Drink wisely. Mature and sensible behavior should prevail in all circumstances where alcohol will be served. Drunkenness is not looked upon as funny or tolerable in other countries. Attitudes towards liquor are different in Europe; moderate drinking is a big part of socializing. Alcohol can impair your judgment—you cannot be alert if you have been drinking.
- Be careful with your personal belongings. Be especially careful in bars and cafes, street markets, and train or bus stations. Never hang your backpack or purse on the back of a chair in public places; keep it in your lap or on the floor between your feet.
- Don't carry large sums of cash.
- Try and stay informed on the world situation via newspapers, radio and TV.
- Be cautious when meeting new people. Don't give out your address, number, AIFS address or School address to people you meet. If you want to give out contact information, give them your cell number only once you know them very well.
- Know where the nearest police station and hospital are and keep emergency numbers handy.
- Avoid any disturbances and demonstrations.

- Recognize and avoid high risk areas. The Program Coordinator will advise you about any.
- Be vigilant. Report suspicious activity or unknown individuals “hanging around” in your building. Be careful of who has access to your home. Visitors should be screened and are not allowed to stay overnight, even family members from the U.S.
- Never accept a package or suitcase from someone you do not know well. Likewise, do not offer to watch someone else’s belongings in train stations, airports, or other public places.
- Safety in numbers – stick with your friends!
- Avoid travelling late at night. If you can’t, sit near driver or conductor. Avoid empty compartments and upstairs on buses.
- Check the taxi is the one you booked. Do not use unlicensed taxis.
- Avoid discussing politics in public.
- Don’t make jail part of your stay abroad. Stay away from drugs. Little can be done to help you if you are caught with illegal drugs. It is your responsibility to know the drug laws of the countries you plan to visit. “I didn’t know” will not get you out of jail.
- If you go anywhere overnight, let the Program Coordinator, your homestay parents, apartment sharers etc know where you are going and when you expect to return. Leave a number where you can be reached if possible.
- Observe your accommodation rules. They are designed to protect the security of all residents.
- In the event of any emergency event, including terrorist activity, please contact your AIFS Program Coordinator to let them know your whereabouts and for advice on how to proceed. You should also contact any friends or family who may be concerned to reassure them of your safety. If necessary you can also contact the nearest US Consulate or Embassy for urgent advice.
- In the event that any personal property gets lost or stolen, you should contact the appropriate authorities abroad and file a claim with CISI Insurance. Please review the CISI Insurance policy regarding personal property loss, including the deductible and maximum allowable financial coverage.

**The emergency contact details are shown on page 2 of this handbook.**

### Medical insurance coverage

All students have AIFS medical insurance which provides extensive coverage. This includes 24-hour emergency telephone assistance service. Multilingual help and advice will be provided in the event of any emergency.

If you require medical attention while abroad the AIFS staff may refer you to a local physician. They will also provide you with the necessary insurance forms and help you with filing claims. Please note that you will be expected to pay up front for all medical expenses and to file an insurance claim for reimbursement. Save any doctors’ bills if you seek treatment.

Always remember to inform the staff first about your sickness and to collect the insurance form from the office.

The AIFS medical insurance plan covers medical bills up to a maximum of \$250,000 for each medically covered illness or accident abroad. For details see the AIFS Group Insurance Plan brochure. It is available online through your AIFS portal: [www.aifsacustomized.com](http://www.aifsacustomized.com)

### Websites dealing with security issues

U.S. Department of State website with up-to-the-minute information about security: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

U.S. Department of State website specifically for students abroad: [travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html)

The free service Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) for U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad allowing them to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate: [step.state.gov/step/](http://step.state.gov/step/)

Details of U.S. Embassies, Consulates and Diplomatic Missions and their emergency services: [www.usembassy.state.gov](http://www.usembassy.state.gov)

## STUDENT CONDUCT

---

As part of the application process, all students sign an Agreement and Release form in which they agree to abide by the rules of the program. According to AIFS policy, during the orientation meeting upon arrival, students must sign a Student Conduct contract and a Drunken Behavior contract in which AIFS points out the rules of behavior as described below. If these rules are not followed the student will be asked to leave the program without the possibility of refund.

### Alcohol and drugs

Excessive consumption of alcohol and use of illegal drugs is forbidden and will result in immediate dismissal from the program without rebate. Students must obey the laws of the host country.

### Probation and dismissal

Students who fail to maintain standards of conduct and academic achievement may be removed from AIFS accommodation or be dismissed without rebate. A note to this effect will be placed on the student’s permanent record.

Students dismissed because of academic or disciplinary standing forfeit all academic credit. A professor may fail a student because of excessive unexcused absences, as well as by examination or other evaluation.

In cases of misconduct, a student may be warned, placed on non-academic probation, academically withdrawn or dismissed from the program as the circumstances warrant. The decision of the Director of the AIFS College Division is final.

### **Rude, aggressive and offensive behavior**

AIFS will not tolerate rude, aggressive or offensive behavior, or verbal abuse towards AIFS staff, host families or academic staff. Students who do not maintain acceptable standards of behavior may be removed from AIFS accommodations or removed from the program without rebate. AIFS has the complete discretion to communicate with a student's home college or university regarding any issue at any time.

## **CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION**

Few European cities have undergone such continual redefinition and change as Berlin. Berlin's restored identity as the nation's capital has been the driving force in both design and cultural diversity in Germany. The political and cultural developments of the 19th and 20th centuries are visible throughout Berlin's cityscape, reflecting both the history of architecture and various approaches to dealing with the consequences of war and destruction.

AIFS staff helps students take advantage of the cultural offerings by organizing activities throughout your stay. It may not be possible to include all these events in any one program. Past activities have included:

- Berlin city tour
- Boat trip
- Bike tour
- Visit to a brewery
- Museum visits
- Walking tours
- Picnics and social events

You can also suggest free time activities yourself if you consider it to be interesting for other students, too. We will try to organize it.



### **Sports**

The AIFS staff can help you take advantage of sports facilities available in Berlin. Students find that renting or buying a used bike is a great way of getting around the city. There are guided bike tours you can join for an afternoon. Many students go swimming in a public pool or play beach volleyball or go running in their neighborhood.



## Connect with us!



**aifsabroad**

<https://www.instagram.com/aifscustomized/>  
<https://www.instagram.com/aifsabroad/>



**AIFS Study Abroad**

<https://www.facebook.com/AIFScustomized/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/AIFSAbroad/>



**@aifscustomized**

<https://twitter.com/aifscustomized>  
<https://twitter.com/aifsabroad>

# PACKING LIST

Remember:

- Have a sturdy label on your luggage and attach something to your case to identify it easily.
- Pack lightly and check the local climate
- Check the baggage restrictions for each airline you will be flying with
- Do not bring valuable/expensive items
- Machine washable clothes are best
- Most toiletries can be purchased abroad
- Pack a few clothes and toiletries in your carry-on bag to get you through the first night in case your checked baggage gets delayed.



## Clothing

## Toiletries

## Extras

<input type="checkbox"/>	Underwear	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toothbrush/toothpaste	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laptop/tablet
<input type="checkbox"/>	Socks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deodorant	<input type="checkbox"/>	MP3 player
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undershirt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sanitary products	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earphone/Headphones
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long sleeve shirt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact lens solution	<input type="checkbox"/>	USB cable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Short sleeve shirts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra prescription glasses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Charger
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweatshirt or Sweater	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brush/Comb	<input type="checkbox"/>	Backpack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jeans/Khakis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shaving Razor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Alarm clock
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shorts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nail Clippers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital camera
<input type="checkbox"/>	Belt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Makeup	<input type="checkbox"/>	Money belt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Skirts/Dresses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prescribed medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dictionary/language app
<input type="checkbox"/>	Workout clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over the counter medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Umbrella
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pajamas	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunscreen	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sun hat
<input type="checkbox"/>	Light Jacket	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical Adapter
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nice outfit with smart shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandals/Sneakers	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimsuit	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beach/bath/tea towels	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shower shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	