



General Travel Information for Local Pre-Departure Orientations

Travel Notification

The Travel and Logistics Coordination Department sends out travel notifications 6- 8 weeks prior to departure **via e-mail** for those students that are partner accepted and in preparation.

- Travel Notifications are e-mailed out on a rolling basis thereafter.
- Notifications are directed to the student and copied to all parents. The **Travel Notification** includes:
 - A **Takeoff Bulletin** (which includes guidelines for purchasing domestic travel)
 - International flight itinerary
 - Instructions for students who have domestic travel included in their AFS Scholarship:
 - NSLI-Y, YES Abroad, & BP scholarship students only
 - The orientation site and phone number
 - The *"What Do I Do When I Get Off The Plane in..."* letter

The **Takeoff Bulletin** and *What Do I Do* documents are sent as links within the travel notification.

The AFS luggage tags and a hardcopy of the *What Do I Do* will be mailed to students a few weeks prior to departure.

Flying to the International Gateway City

In most cases, it will be necessary for participants to fly to the city from which they leave on their AFS program, known as the "International Gateway City."

The International Gateway City will most likely be one of the following:

- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami, FL
- New York, NY
- Washington, DC

Domestic travel from a student's hometown to the International Gateway City is **not** included in the AFS program fee for most students.

The **Travel Notification** also includes instructions on how to enter the student's domestic travel arrangements in the Online Application. Students **must** enter their domestic travel information in their Student Portal in a timely fashion.

Note for NSLI-Y, YES Abroad and BP scholarship students

- Domestic travel for these students is covered as a part of their scholarship
- Students are instructed to contact AFS Travel for their domestic travel.

Gateway Arrival Logistics

In most cases, students are expected to arrive at their International Gateway City **by 4:00 pm** or earlier, the day before their international departure.

- Some programs/countries may receive special instructions regarding the arrival time into their gateway city.

- **NSLI-Y** students are expected to arrive at their International Gateway City **2 days prior** to their international departure.
- **Global Prep** programs students do not receive a gateway orientation. They are expected to arrive the day of their international flight at least 5 hours prior to the departure time.
- Confirmation of this information will be included in the students' Travel Notifications.

Please note that we do not always meet students at the airport on the day of domestic arrivals. Students should refer to their What Do I Do bulletin in order to determine whether they should meet up with AFS staff at the airport or go directly to the hotel via the courtesy shuttle.

Frequent Flier Miles

AFS does not permit students to use frequent flyer award tickets, employee passes, etc. for international travel. The international ticket is a part of the AFS participation fee. AFS participants are officially on the AFS program once they arrive at their gateway orientation and must fly with the group using AFS purchased tickets.

Students may use frequent flyer award tickets and employee passes for domestic travel from their hometown to the International Gateway City as long as they abide by the schedule limitations outlined in the Travel Bulletin.

Passports and Visas

If a student has not yet applied for a passport, he or she needs to do so **immediately**. Students will receive visa instructions shortly after they are guaranteed. Some countries have lengthier visa application procedures, so students applying to those countries will receive visa documentation instructions while their application is still under consideration by the host country.

- Not all participants will need a visa for their AFS program, but everyone will receive instructions.
- **Due to the increase in the number of students encountering visa problems prior to departure...**
 - We recommend that all students purchase refundable and/or changeable domestic tickets.
 - AFS is not responsible for any penalties on domestic tickets for late departures due to visa problems.

If a student cannot obtain a visa in time to travel with the group due to paperwork being submitted late or incorrectly, they will be responsible for all additional costs associated with a late departure. This includes, but is not limited to, penalties on the international ticket and hotel costs.

Documentation

Students should make at least two copies of their passport and birth certificate; leave one set of copies at home and bring another set abroad. Passport and birth certificate copies can expedite the process of replacing a lost or stolen passport.

Students who need to send their passports to the AFS USA office **must** use a "trackable" system such as FedEx, DHL, or UPS overnight mail. AFS will return passports to students at the International Gateway airport prior to departure.

Please refer to the AFS website for country-specific visa information.

Luggage

AFS bases its luggage restrictions on the most restrictive airlines.

In many cases, students are subjected to more stringent luggage regulations when they travel domestically within the U.S. and within their host country. For this reason, the AFS baggage recommendation is often more restrictive than the allowance of the international air carrier. While most international carriers will allow one (1) checked pieces of luggage at 50 lbs., the AFS baggage allowance is:

- 1 carry-on bag and
- 1 piece of checked luggage not to exceed 44 pounds.

Please note that AFS assumes no responsibility for **ANY** luggage fees charged by airlines.

Since the airlines are increasing the limitations on baggage, participants **MUST** contact their domestic and international carriers before purchasing/packing luggage.

- Most international carriers are now limiting bags to one checked pieces at 50 lbs, with some carriers charging for the 1st bag during high season
- Most domestic carriers are charging a \$25+ fee for the first piece of checked luggage
- Some domestic carriers are have now disallowed carry-on bags for standard economy tickets, so please be careful when purchasing your domestic ticket.

For those students going abroad for the semester or year, we suggest that they ship their “off-season” clothing before leaving the US and again, several months prior to their return.

Gateway Orientations

For those students who have a gateway orientation, per their travel notification attendance is **mandatory** at the **overnight event**.

NOTE: Global Prep programs do not have a gateway orientation.

In most cases, the orientation includes:

- Overnight accommodations at a hotel or university residence hall,
- Dinner on the first night
- Breakfast in the morning,
- Additional meals depending upon the flight departure time

The orientation itself begins in the evening the day before the international departure. For those students being driven to the site, they should plan on arriving no later than one hour prior to the start time in order to have enough time to get settled. This arrival time will be specified in the *What Do I Do* document. Upon arrival, students must register and say goodbye to their parents.

Natural families are not permitted to attend the Gateway Orientation. This orientation serves as a “buffer” between the natural family and the student’s experience abroad. For this reason, parents are strongly discouraged from staying at the same hotel.

Returning Home

Return Travel Notifications are e-mailed to natural families and copied to the student roughly three (3) months prior to the group return date for year and semester programs and one to two weeks prior to return for short programs. Return international travel is included in the AFS fee structure.

Upon disembarking their international flight in the US and clearing customs, students are met at the international terminal and given an envelope that contains:

- Their domestic e-ticket receipt,
- A map of the airport
- A letter with specific instructions for making domestic connections and/or staying overnight.

Students are responsible for making their own domestic connections. AFS staff is available for questions, guidance and emergencies. In New York, students can share taxis between JFK and LaGuardia airports.

In case of international flight delays:

- Parent/guardian of the participant will be responsible for any domestic re-bookings since the Travel and Logistics Department does not have access to these itineraries.
- Please remember that AFS USA is not responsible for domestic ticket change fees due to international flight delays, schedule changes or flight cancellations.

Students should save at least **\$100.00** for the **return trip** to cover meals, airport transfers, baggage fees, etc. These expenses are **not** covered by AFS.

AFS will provide hotel accommodations and a chaperone when:

- No domestic flights are available on **any airline at any fare** on the day of return.
- The international flight is delayed so that no domestic flight is available.
- AFS will not cover overnight costs if the overnight stay is due to a free or mileage ticket.

If students have any additional travel-related questions, please instruct them to contact the Travel and Logistics Department at 1-800-AFS- INFO (1-800-237-4636), dial 6. Students and parents can also send an email to afs.sending.travel@afsusa.org.

Leaving the Program Early or Extending Stay for Personal Reasons

Students or nat fams may speak to their AFS advisor regarding the possibility of returning early from, or staying longer in, their host country. Due to Visa and/or program restrictions not all countries allow program releases for personal reasons.

Please refer them to their Participation Agreement for details and protocol. Information regarding this process can also be found in the Return Travel Notification in the Changes to Travel Arrangements document. Send an email to afs.sending.travel@afsusa.org with questions.