

# Common Questions: Students Preparing to Depart

## Safety

- **How do I know that the family that my daughter is going to be placed with is safe?**
- **I am concerned about the area in which my son has been placed and am worried that he will not be safe.**
- **What does AFS do to keep my son safe while abroad? What would they do if there is another flu outbreak, a natural disaster? Political unrest, or terrorism?**

The safety of our participants is AFS's #1 priority. Our website has extensive information about the support we provide to students and families during programs, and the criteria we use to verify that countries are safe: [http://www.afsusa.org/usa\\_en/view/7954](http://www.afsusa.org/usa_en/view/7954)

## Placement

- **Why does my daughter not have a host family yet?**

Matching students with host families is a complex process that works a little differently in each AFS partner country. It is not a process that we want to rush, because 2<sup>nd</sup> only to your child's health and safety, our next priority is ensuring the success of her experience abroad. It is very common for students not to receive their host family or placement details until the month prior to departure. *(It is often helpful to point out that the student is not alone, this is common, and other students are also waiting for their placement details).*

- **I am not comfortable with the host family placement for my child for (x) reason.**

AFS host families come in all shapes and sizes, just like families do here. This family has been chosen and screened by the partner country, and they feel like this is a good match for your child. Being flexible and open-minded is an integral part of the AFS experience. *(Inquire about the reason for discomfort- common reasons are lack of teenage host siblings, or presence of **male** teenage host siblings, or the family lives in a geographical area that is seen as undesirable, or a variety of other issues).*

- **What type of vaccinations should my daughter get?**

Because we are not medically trained professionals, AFS does not provide medical advice, (beyond what may be **required** for the visa process), so we suggest that participants consult with their families, personal doctors, and the CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/)

## Credit

- **My school is insisting that I have a list of all of my classes that I will take while abroad.**

In most cases, we won't be able to provide this until shortly before you depart, or in some cases you may not know until you sign up for classes in your host-country. The best thing to do is to meet with your school and find out what courses you need in order to graduate, and we can see if it will be possible for you to take those while you are abroad. [http://www.afsusa.org/usa\\_en/view/5342](http://www.afsusa.org/usa_en/view/5342)

- **How do I ensure that my school will accept the credits that I get while abroad?**

AFS cannot guarantee credit transfer. Each school district sets its own rules in this area. See this page on our website for further information: [http://www.afsusa.org/usa\\_en/view/5342](http://www.afsusa.org/usa_en/view/5342)

## Visa

- **What happens if I do not get my visa documents on time?**

We will do everything in our power to make sure you get these in time for your departure. The partner country is aware of the schedule by which you need these, and all of us would prefer that you have an on-time departure. This is why it is important that you fulfill your obligations for the visa process.

- **I can't get a hold of the visa coordinator and I have questions about my visa.**

*(Verify that the participant has read through the instructions carefully, if necessary pull them up on our website and go over with the participant or parent to make sure their question cannot be answered simply from a close reading of the instructions).*

This is a very busy time of year and the visa coordinator is experiencing a high volume of calls. The Visa coordinator will prioritize according to urgency. Visa instructions are posted here:

[http://www.afsusa.org/usa\\_en/view/7159](http://www.afsusa.org/usa_en/view/7159)

## **Orientations**

- **Do I have to attend my pre departure orientation?**

Yes, attendance is mandatory. Part of your tuition pays for these orientations, which are designed to help you prepare for your program and keep you safe while you are abroad.

- **What do I do if I cannot attend my PDO**

There may be another PDO in a local area further from your home on a different date that you could attend instead. In some situations a phone orientation may be possible, but we really prefer you to attend in person if possible. Contact your Student Services Advisor and he/she will look into alternate dates and locations for you.

## **Finance**

- **When is the last date that I can pay the tuition balance?**

You can find the payment schedule for your tuition balance online

[http://www.usa.afs.org/usa\\_en/view/7992](http://www.usa.afs.org/usa_en/view/7992)), and also on the last page of the Form 10 (Participation Agreement).

- **How do I pay the tuition?**

You can pay online with a credit card through your Participant Account, over the phone with a Student Services advisor, or you can mail a check to Participant Accounts in New York.

- **I received a scholarship, but it's not reflected on my invoice. I need a new copy.**

Call Participant Accounts 1-800-876-2376 x1082, to request a new invoice.

## **Travel & Packing**

- **The prices for the domestic tickets are going up, when will get my international travel information?**

The Travel Department will email you your travel notification 6-8 weeks prior to your departure. We buy our tickets in a group, so usually we must wait until the we have a complete list of all participants before booking the travel. We apologize for any inconvenience on your part, and we do our best to get this information to you as soon as possible.

- **What type of gifts should I bring for my host family?**

Bring small gifts that are representative of the area you are from. Also, see the AFS Guide for Participants: pg. 23

- **What is the luggage requirement?**

1 personal item, 1 carry-on, and 1 checked bag no more than 44 lbs.

In some cases students flying domestically within their host countries may have lower weight limits, and in these cases they will be informed ahead of time by their Student Services Advisors as soon as this information is relayed by the partner country.

- **What happens if my bags are too heavy?**

You may have to pay a fee to the airline. If that happens, you will need to be ready to pay this. AFS cannot cover this expense.

- **Will I be met at the airport when I arrive for my gateway orientation?**

This varies by departure city, but all of this information will be included in your Travel notification email. This will include a link to a document called “What do I do when I get off the plane?”

- **What should I pack?**

This will of course vary by country, but see the resources below for some pointers. The country-specific information (emailed to you approximately 6 weeks prior to departure) will also alert you if any special attire or items are required for your country. For further information, refer to the following resources:

1. AFS Guide for Participants pages 28-32
2. AFS Guide for Families of Participants page 31
3. Take Off packet page 4

- **How will my son get in touch with me when he gets to Spain? Can I send a cell phone with him?**

There will be a phone available to your son in his host family’s house. He may need to purchase a calling card once he arrives in order to do so, and his host family or local volunteers will help him with this. We caution students who plan to bring their own cell phones, but this is ultimately up to participants and their families to decide. If you are planning to do this, you should call your phone provider to research your options. In many cases it is cheaper and easier to buy a phone in your host-country, but of course this varies by country.

For further information, see the AFS Guide for Participants page 31-32

- **Can I bring my violin, laptop computer, ipod etc, with me?**

We caution students who plan to bring any extremely valuable items with them on program. If you do bring valuable items with you, we encourage you to look into Voluntary Liability (Theft Insurance):

[http://www.usa.afs.org/usa\\_en/view/6854](http://www.usa.afs.org/usa_en/view/6854)

For further information, see the AFS Guide for Participants page 31-32

## While Abroad

- **My child takes a daily medication, should I just have him pack enough for the entire program?**

*(First verify with the parent that this medication was listed on their AFS Application, and that the Student Services advisor is aware of this.)* This depends on the medication. It is always a good idea to get a doctor’s note, and check with the consulate or embassy for your host-country to research this. For further information, see the AFS Guide for Participants page 30

- **Does the secondary medical insurance cover preexisting conditions?**

No, it does not. Further details about your medical insurance can be found in your AFS Account.

- **Can I take the SAT or ACT abroad?**

Other AFS Participants have reported that it’s best to take the SATs or PSATs before you go or after you return. Besides the inconvenience of getting to the testing location, your scores might reflect that you haven’t been speaking much English! To find out more about taking the SATs abroad, consult the [College Board](#) website.

- **How much money should I bring with me?**

This depends on your host-country and your spending habits. We usually suggest \$100-\$400/ month spending money, and you may need extra for optional trips or other activities that are not required parts of your program.

- **My husband and I are planning on visiting our daughter during her program and what do we need to do to work this out.**

If you must do this, we recommend waiting until the end of the program. Please see the sections about this in the AFS Guide for Participants (page 58), and the AFS Guide for Families (page 40).

- **I want to stay in France at the end of the program and travel around Europe with my sister. Can I change my return ticket now?**

No, you will need to wait until after you are on program and discuss this with the Support department.