

# Takeoff



*Travel Information  
For American Students  
Going Abroad*

*2018 Departures*



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## Introduction

Dear Students and Parents:

Welcome! We realize that you probably have a number of questions and concerns related to the travel portion of the AFS experience. We hope that this booklet will answer some of your questions and explain AFS travel guidelines and expectations. Please take the time to read through this brochure and its related documents so that you are familiar with AFS USA's travel procedures.

If you have domestic and/or international specific questions, please contact us at 1-800-AFS-INFO (1-800-237-4636), press 6.

For general questions about your AFS program, please contact your Student Services Advisor, 1-800-AFS-INFO.

Have a wonderful AFS Experience!

The Office of Travel and Logistics Coordination (TLC)



***When in doubt, ask! AFS has a dedicated and experienced staff of airport coordinators, logistics coordinators, and travel agents. If you're not sure about something, give us a call or ask us at the airport.***

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## **International Gateway Cities**

AFS sending programs depart from four different international gateway cities in the United States: Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Washington D.C. Consult your *International Flight Itinerary* to determine your gateway city, arrival date and time.

Domestic travel from your home to the international gateway city is **not** included in the AFS program fee. You may purchase a domestic plane ticket from discount websites, directly from an airline, or from your local travel agent.



**Will you be leaving from Los Angeles, Miami, New York or Washington D.C.? Look at the Travel section of your AFS Dashboard to find out.**

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## **Driving to the Gateway City**

**Please remember that the latest arrival time at the orientation site when driving is one hour prior to the orientation start time stated on the travel notification. Remember to bring your luggage, as you will be spending the night.**

**➔ Remember to complete the Domestic Travel Form-Departure task in your AFS Dashboard.**

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## **Flying to the Gateway City**

AFS recommends purchasing a refundable domestic ticket. Realizing that this type of ticket is usually very expensive, most parents will purchase a round trip non-refundable ticket for short programs and semester programs. However, AFS-USA is **not** responsible for penalties on domestic tickets should your trip be delayed. These delays can be related, but not limited to, severe weather, personal illness, visa problems, etc.

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### **Arrival times**

Please refer to the travel notification for the arrival city, date and time. We have also attached the “*What Do I Do When I Get Off the Plane?*” sheet that has specific travel instructions from your flight to the orientation.

**➔ Orientations almost always begin the day before the international flight.**

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## **Purchasing a Ticket**

### **Year Program**

You will need to purchase two one-way tickets. A return travel notification will be sent to you and your family approximately 3 months prior to the return date. You can purchase your return flight(s) at this time.

### **Semester and 2-8 week Summer Programs**

Summer and Semester program participants are encouraged to purchase a round-trip ticket with a flexible return date. Return flight information is located on the *International Flight Itinerary*. Although return flights do not change frequently, they are subject to change until you receive the *Return Travel Notification*. For this reason, AFS cannot be responsible for fees associated with changing a domestic ticket in the event of an international schedule change.

AFS will e-mail *Travel Notification - Return* to families approximately 3 months prior to the return date for year and semester programs and two weeks for short programs. This notification will contain confirmed return flight information and specific instructions concerning purchasing or reconfirming domestic return flights.

If there have been any return international flight changes, you may need to rebook the return domestic ticket at this time. Remember that AFS is not responsible for domestic change fees due to airline schedule changes.

Please be aware that for most programs there is no re-entry orientation upon arrival back into the US, unless you have received information indicating otherwise. Plan your return flight so that you have a **minimum of three hours** between your international arrival and domestic departure. This time is necessary for US Customs and Immigration formalities, possible international flight delays, and domestic check in. Add an **additional hour** for a transfer between New York’s Kennedy and LaGuardia Airports.



**After purchasing a ticket, complete the Domestic Travel item in your AFS Dashboard. This information is needed so we have the arrival information of each student and contact numbers for the family during the orientation.**

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### **Frequent flyer award tickets**

AFS does not permit participants to use frequent flyer award tickets for international travel, nor does AFS permit students to arrive late at an orientation to accommodate for frequent flyer award tickets, discounted tickets, etc. Participants may, however, use an award ticket for domestic travel.

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### **Special cases: overnight stays and late arrivals**

AFS strictly enforces orientation attendance. For this reason, late arrival to an orientation is not permitted. There are some instances in which no flights are available on any airline at any fare for a student to travel from his or her hometown to the gateway city in time for the orientation. If this should happen, please call the Office of Travel and Logistics Coordination to discuss arrival into the gateway.

For domestic travel after the international return flight, overnight accommodations are provided if domestic travel on the day of your international return flight is impossible because there are **no available flights on any airline at any fare**. If this is the case, contact the Office of Travel and Logistics Coordination (1-800-AFS-INFO, dial 6) to discuss the possibility of a chaperoned overnight stay.

AFS does **not** provide hotel rooms to accommodate for frequent flyer award travel, discounted tickets, etc. This applies to both outbound and return travel.

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## **Takeoff**

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### **How much can I bring?**

Airlines are very strict about enforcing baggage limitations. Since these regulations vary from carrier to carrier, you will need to either check the website or call both the domestic and international airlines for the specific baggage requirements. Please be aware that almost all domestic carriers are now charging \$25-30 for the first piece of checked luggage. Also note that many airlines are starting to not permit carry-on bags for regular economy class seats. **AFS does not cover the cost of any luggage fees on domestic or international flights.**

AFS permits **one piece of checked baggage at 44 pounds**. Almost all airlines permit more than 44 pounds of baggage but many AFS students take domestic flights within their host country. These flights may have more stringent rules regarding

baggage. Furthermore, you have to be able to carry your own bags, so you must make sure you can handle carrying them. Most domestic carriers and many international carriers have reduced their luggage limits to 50 pounds per bag. If you choose to bring additional baggage or overweight bags, you will be responsible for all extra fees that may be charged by the airlines.

In case your luggage gets lost, always keep the following items in your carry-on bag(s):

1. Your domestic itinerary and other travel documents
2. Your passport (unless you have already sent it to AFS for visa purposes)
3. The "What Do I Do When I Get Off the Plane?" sheet
4. A change of clothes
5. Prescription medication (well-labeled)
6. Valuable items (eyeglasses, jewelry, etc.)
7. Absolutely necessary toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste, contact lens solution) in accordance with TSA regulations ([www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov))
8. Any other items specifically requested by the AFS Host partner for you to have with you in your carry-on luggage.

Keep your carry-on bags limited to a backpack or something similar in size. **The average carry-on bag is limited to 8 inches x 16 inches x 21 inches or 45 linear inches and a weight of 22 pounds**. Most airlines will permit passengers to carry a purse, umbrella, or camera in addition to one carry-on bag.

We will mail yellow luggage tags prior to your departure. Once you have received your host family/hosting location, fill it out on the luggage tags and attach them to your luggage. These tags ensure that AFS airport staff will be able to recognize you and will help us to locate your luggage if it gets lost. It is also important to ensure that you keep your name and address on the inside of your bags in case the external tag falls off.



1. **Pack lightly.**
2. **Don't pack any valuables in your checked baggage.**
3. **Use the yellow luggage tags, which you will receive in the mail.**

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### **Shipping items to your Host Country**

Please check with your local post office or other shipping services regarding regulations and costs. Some countries will not allow used items to be

shipped. Other countries will charge a duty tax to release the package to the recipient.

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### **Representing AFS**

AFS has an excellent reputation with airlines and hotels. You can help us to maintain this reputation by observing the following guidelines:

Remember, your behavior at the airport and during your flights—domestic and international—represents the thousands of students traveling on AFS programs worldwide.

1. Be patient and polite when dealing with airline and airport staff.
2. Be conscious of your space -- keep conversations at an acceptable volume and make sure that the subject matter is appropriate for that 10 year old sitting next to you!

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### **Checking in for your domestic flight**

Check in early! Plan to arrive at the airport **at least** 2 hours prior to the departure of your flight.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires that passengers over the age of 18 present government-issued photo identification prior to boarding any flight. If you do not yet have a driver's license and your passport has been forwarded to AFS for visa purposes, just inform the airline staff of the situation and explain that the identification law only applies to passengers over age 18.

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### **Safety and security**

Although air travel is exceptionally safe, there are a few things you can do to look after yourself and your belongings.

1. Since all baggage is screened, do not lock your suitcases; consider buying a luggage strap.
2. Do not pack any TSA prohibited objects in your carry-on bag.
3. Keep an eye on your belongings; never leave your bags unattended.
4. Keep your wallet and passport in a safe place on your person.
5. Don't accept packages from strangers.
6. Wear your seatbelt while you are on the plane.

The most up-to-date information regarding packing guidelines can be found at the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) website: [www.tsatraveltips.us](http://www.tsatraveltips.us).

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### **What if I miss my domestic flight?**

#### **What if my flight is delayed or cancelled?**

Stay calm. Delays and cancellations are common, so don't panic. As soon as you have received new domestic flight information or a new arrival time, call the orientation site. The phone number is listed on the "What Do I Do When I Get Off the Plane?" information sheet and your travel itinerary letter. You will receive a printed copy in the mail with your yellow luggage tags.

***If you cannot reach an AFS representative at the orientation site, please call 1-800-AFS-INFO (1-800-237-4636), and press 6 between 9:00am and 5:30pm Eastern Time. After business hours (5:30 pm Eastern Time) and on weekends, press 9, and provide the operator with your name and phone number so that an AFS representative can return your call.***

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### **What do I do if my bags get lost?**

If your bags don't make it to your international gateway city, take the following steps:

1. **Before you leave the airport...** Go to the baggage service office for your airline. Complete any lost baggage claim form, so that the airline has all the necessary information to find your bags. Be prepared to present your ticket and to describe what your bags look like.
2. Provide the airline with the phone number of the orientation site—this is printed on the "What Do I Do When I Get Off the Plane?" information sheet.
3. Advise the airline that you will be leaving the USA within 24 hours.
4. As soon as you arrive at your orientation, advise an AFS staff member that your bags are missing so they can follow up with the airline.

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## **Gateway Orientation**

The Gateway orientation gives you a chance to meet other students who will be going to the same country, meet with AFS staff and volunteers, and ask any last-minute questions. In addition, the Gateway orientation serves as a "buffer" between your family and traveling abroad; for this reason, **families are not invited to attend the Gateway orientation, and they are discouraged from staying at the hotel where the orientation is being held, once the orientation begins.**

The orientation, which includes discussion sessions, games, meals (beginning with dinner on the day of arrival), and free time, lasts from the afternoon/evening on the day prior to the international flight up until the international departure. Please see the enclosed travel letter for your arrival date and time.

***The Gateway orientation is an overnight experience. You will be provided with hotel or dormitory accommodations with other AFS students.***

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## ***The International Flight***

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### ***Checking in***

Although AFS staff will assist you with international check in, be prepared for the following.

1. You will be required to present your passport. AFS will have collected your passport for the duration of the gateway orientation, so we will return your passport to you at check in.
2. AFS will collect your international e-ticket after check-in. An AFS chaperone or a designated student will hold on to the e-ticket receipts and hand them in to the AFS staff in your host country.

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### ***Frequent flyer credit***

If you participate in a frequent flyer program, keep your membership number handy and present it to the agent when you check in. Although most AFS-issued tickets are eligible for frequent flyer credit, we cannot guarantee that the airlines will always provide such credit. AFS will not apply your frequent flyer code to the airline prior to check in.

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### ***Flight Chaperones***

Most students will not have an AFS chaperone on their flight. AFS only provides a chaperone when there are a large number of students traveling on the same flight.

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### ***On board***

1. Airplanes can be cold! Wear comfortable, long pants and keep a sweatshirt or sweater in your carry-on bag.
2. Feet tend to swell on long flights. Be sure to wear loose-fitting shoes.
3. Jet lag is primarily a result of dehydration. For this reason, keep drinking non-alcoholic, decaffeinated, non-carbonated beverages as much as possible. Water, juice, and lemonade are good choices.

4. The dry air on airplanes can irritate contact lenses; you might wish to take your contacts out before your flight.
5. Wear sensible clothing! Your hosting AFS team will meet you soon, and you want to make a good first impression. Remember, you can only make one first impression!

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## ***Customs and Immigration***

In most instances, you will receive a landing card during your international flight. This card will ask you for your name, your host family's address or contact information, and other various information. Read the instructions carefully; you might need to write in capital letters, you might need to write the date in a different order (day-month-year instead of month-day-year), and so forth. If there is an AFS chaperone on board your flight, you can ask him or her for assistance; in other cases, ask an airline crew member for assistance.

Once you have arrived in your host country, you will first clear immigration followed by customs. You will have to present your passport, perhaps answer a few questions ("How long will you be in this country?" or "What is the purpose of your visit?") and so forth. As always, answer with a simple, direct, and honest response.

After clearing immigration, a customs inspector may choose to inspect your bags either by x-ray or by hand. If this happens, it is important to be polite, and to answer any questions truthfully. Do not make jokes.

AFS staff or volunteers will meet your flight immediately outside of customs in your host country.

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## ***Orientation in Your Host Country***

Each AFS Partner has an individual orientation schedule. In some countries, you will go directly to your host families with an orientation taking place several weeks later. Other countries will have a 2-3 day orientation upon your arrival in the host country with other hosted participants from other countries around the world. At this orientation camp, you may not have access to a phone or a computer. Therefore, you may not be able to call home right upon your arrival and will have to wait until you reach your host family. If there are any major problems with the group arrival into the host country, AFS staff will contact each family immediately.

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## Coming Home

About 3 months prior to the end of the program, AFS will e-mail *Travel Notifications- Return to families*. For summer programs, Return Travel Notifications will be e-mailed two weeks prior to the end of the program. This *Travel Notification* contains specific information regarding return international flights and domestic travel arrangements, and it also serves as a confirmation of the return flight arrangements for the summer and semester programs.

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### Quick Tips

- AFS staff or volunteers will meet your return flight immediately outside of US Customs. We will give you an envelope containing your flight information, a map of the airport and a welcome home letter including emergency contact phone numbers.
- When booking your return flight, don't forget to leave a minimum of **three hours** between your international arrival and domestic departure.
- AFS will provide a hotel room and a chaperone only if there are no domestic flights available on **any** airline at **any** fare on the day of your international flight –OR- the international flight experiences a lengthy delay and no later flights are available.
- If you choose to purchase frequent flyer, awards travel, or discounted tickets that prevent travel on the day of arrival, AFS will **not** provide a hotel room for you. This includes travel on discount airlines and tickets purchased on the Internet.
- **Be sure to have at least \$100 for your return trip home in case your flight is delayed and you need to stay overnight.** You will be responsible for your own meals, transportation back to the airport the next morning and any luggage charges for your domestic flight. AFS will cover the cost of the hotel room.
- If you will be arriving into New York and will be flying out of LaGuardia Airport, you are responsible for your own transportation from Kennedy Airport to LaGuardia Airport. A bus takes about 1 to 1½ hours and costs \$16; a taxi costs about \$35-40. Most students will share taxis.
- Please remember that AFS-USA is **not** responsible for costs incurred due to international or domestic airline delays for whatever reason. These costs include domestic ticket change fees, meals or transportation.

- Please remember that almost all US domestic carriers are charging \$25-30 for each piece of checked luggage. Check with your domestic carrier for weight limits to ensure that you will be under these limits or have money to pay the overweight charges. You may also want to consider shipping a few packages from your host country a few weeks prior to your return.

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## International Student Identification Cards (ISIC)

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AFS-USA will be issuing ISIC cards for all AFS participants. The cost of this card is included in your participation fee. You will receive the card at your gateway orientation.

Depending upon your host country, the ISIC card will give you certain discounts to transportation, museums and some shops and restaurants. As the card is valid for one year from the date of issue, you will be able to use this card on discounts when you return home. For a complete list of discounts in the US and your host country, please visit the ISIC website at: [www.myISIC.com](http://www.myISIC.com). You do not need to apply for the card online, nor do you need to send in the \$22 fee. AFS-USA will do this for you.



**You will receive your ISIC card at your gateway orientation. If you have any questions regarding the ISIC card please contact the NY Office of Travel and Logistics at 1-800-AFS-INFO (1-800-237-4636) and press 6.**

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## Information and Questions about Passports and Visas

By the time you receive this travel information packet, you should have already applied for and received your passport. **If you have not applied for your passport, please do so immediately!**

Please make sure that the name you used when you completed your AFS application matches the name on your passport. The name you have given to AFS is what will appear on your international ticket. The airlines WILL NOT allow you to check in if these names do not match. For example, if you used Jeff Smith on your application but your legal name is Jeffrey, this will not be acceptable to the airlines. **If you have not given us your legal name, you will be responsible for any additional**

**costs associated with the re-issuance of the ticket with your correct name.** Please contact your Study Abroad Specialist if you need to correct your name.

All participants on all programs can expect to receive a Visa Information e-mail/mailling from AFS 1 to 4 months prior to departure. The timing of this information will depend on when your program departs and the complexity of your host country's entry requirements. Once you receive your Visa Information mailing from AFS, please make sure to open it and read it carefully to determine whether or not a visa is required for your program. If a visa is required, be sure to follow visa instructions completely and in a timely manner so that you have any required travel documents in order before departure.

Please remember to make 2 copies of your passport and visa before you leave home: 1 copy to leave at home and 1 to bring with you.

If you have questions and/or problems with obtaining your passport and/or visa, please e-mail [sendingvisas@afsusa.org](mailto:sendingvisas@afsusa.org).

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## ***Further Assistance***

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### ***Questions about host families, orientations, travel dates, etc.***

Contact your Student Services Advisor at 1-800-AFS-INFO (1-800-237-4636).

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### ***Questions about domestic travel to or from the gateway:***

Contact the NY office of Travel and Logistics at 1-800-AFS-INFO and press 6.