



General Sending Travel Information for Local Pre-Departure Orientations

Travel Notification

The Travel and Logistics Coordination Department sends out travel notifications **via e-mail** to accepted participants beginning 4-8 weeks prior to departure.

- ▶ *Travel Notifications* are e-mailed out on a rolling basis thereafter.
- ▶ Notifications are directed to the participant and copied to all parent(s).
- ▶ All information appears on the participant's dashboard.

The ***Travel Notification*** includes travel information and links to:

- ▶ A ***Takeoff*** Bulletin
- ▶ International flight itinerary
- ▶ Instructions for purchasing a domestic ticket
- ▶ A link to the login page for the participants' Dashboard so they can upload domestic travel information.

The AFS luggage tags and other AFS information will be mailed to participants a few weeks prior to departure.

Flying to the International Departure Airport

In many cases, it will be necessary for participants to fly to the airport from which they will embark on their international travel, known as the "International Gateway City."

The International Gateway City is determined upon international flight schedules, program dates, AFS countries departing on the same date and number of participants travelling. The departure location will be included in the student's travel notification after their international ticket is issued. Domestic travel from a participant's hometown to the International Gateway City is **not** included in the AFS program fee for most participants, except for scholarship programs (see below).

Note for Congress Bundestag, NSLI-Y and YES Abroad

- ▶ Domestic travel for the NSLI and YES Abroad participants is covered as a part of their scholarship. CB students must purchase their own domestic travel.
- ▶ Participants will be instructed on whom to contact for their domestic travel.

International Gateway Arrival Logistics

In most cases, participants are expected to arrive at their International Gateway airport at least 4 hours prior to flight departure time if driving and 5 hours if they are flying to the gateway airport. The Travel Notification includes the following information related to day-of travel logistics:

- ▶ Arrival/check in time at airport.
- ▶ Program specific special instructions
- ▶ Specific instructions on how and where to check in for their international flights
- ▶ Emergency contact numbers for AFS USA and their AFS partner office

Frequent Flier Miles

AFS does not permit participants 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 check in for their international flight and must fly using AFS purchased tickets.

Participants 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 Notification*.

Passports and Visas

Passports need to be valid for at least 6 months beyond the program return date and are often required several months before the program start. In the NH cycle and SH cycles, all participants should have valid passports by April 15 and November 15 respectively. It is imperative that all participants make their best effort to receive their passports by these dates or earlier.

- ▶ Most participants will receive visa guidelines shortly after their applications are accepted by the partner organization.
- ▶ Some countries have lengthier visa application procedures, so participants applying to those countries will receive visa guidelines while their application is still under consideration by the host country.
- ▶ Not all participants need a visa for their AFS program, and those participants will receive confirmation of this fact shortly after their applications are accepted by the partner organization.
- ▶ In most cases where a visa is not needed, the participants must collect several documents to carry to a destination country in order to obtain a valid residence permit after arrival.
- ▶ General Visa FAQ's can be found here: <https://www.afsusa.org/study-abroad/faq/visa/>
- ▶ Whenever you have a visa question, please review the Visa FAQ's and/or contact sendingvisas@afsusa.org.
- ▶ **Due to the increase in the number of participants encountering visa problems prior to departure:**
 - We recommend that all participants purchase refundable and/or changeable domestic tickets.
 - AFS is not responsible for any penalties on domestic tickets for late departures due to visa problems.
 - While AFS provides visa guidance to the participants to ensure their success, it is the participants' responsibility to obtain correct travel documents on time.

If a participant cannot obtain a visa in time to travel with the group due to visa application documents 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

Participants should make at least two copies of their passport, visa page and their birth certificate; one set of copies to leave at home and the other set to bring with them. Passport and birth certificate copies can expedite the process of replacing a lost or stolen passport. Unless advised differently by in-country staff for traveling, participants should leave their passports in a safe location at their host family's residence and carry their passport photocopy with them throughout their stay.

Participants should also carry with them negative PCR test results when applicable. Participants need to be sure that the test and results were collected within the time frame mandated by the hosting country's government. These regulations will be communicated to them ahead of time, but they should bring at least 1 hard copy of the negative test results with them in order to board their international flight and enter their host country.

Participants who need to send their visa related documents to AFS will be provided with a staff address in the visa guidelines. They should use "trackable" mail and fast delivery option.

Luggage

AFS bases its luggage guidelines on the most restrictive airlines. In many cases, participants 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 guideline is often more restrictive than the allowance of the international air carrier and are as follows:

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

Please note that while the above is AFS baggage allowance, AFS assumes no responsibility for **any** luggage fees on either domestic or international flights.

As many airlines have increased the limitations on baggage (both size and weight), **participants should contact their domestic and international carriers before purchasing luggage.**

- ▶ Most international carriers are now limiting bags to one checked piece at 50 lbs.
- ▶ Most domestic carriers are charging a \$35+ fee for each piece of checked luggage and restricting the size of the carry-on unless additional fees are paid.

The use of vacuum bags can be very helpful when packing sweaters and bulky items.

If you have any luggage questions, please contact the airline directly.

Returning Home

Return Travel Notification packets are e-mailed approximately 2 – 3 months prior to the group return date for year and semester programs. For short programs, the return notification is sent immediately upon departure on program.

Participants are responsible for making their own domestic connections. AFS staff on call and are available for questions, guidance and emergencies. In case of international flight delays:

- ▶ Parent/guardian of the participant will be responsible for any domestic re-bookings and costs related to these changes.
- ▶ Please remember that AFS USA is not responsible for domestic ticket change fees due to international flight delays, schedule changes or flight cancellations.

Participants 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 only 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 participants have any additional travel-related questions, please instruct them to contact the Travel and Logistics Department in New York City at 1-800-AFS-INFO, dial 6. Participants and parents can also send an email to afs.sending.travel@afsusa.org.

Leaving the Program Early or Extending Stay

Participants may inquire as to what happens regarding returning early from, or staying longer in, their host country. Please refer them to their Participation Agreement for details, fees and protocol. Information regarding this process can also be found in the Return Travel Notification in the *Return International Travel for Personal Reasons* document. Participants may not travel to the country before the start of the program. Send an email to afs.sending.travel@afsusa.org with questions.