

COVID-19 Protocols & Best Practices for SIT Custom Programs

The purpose of this document is to provide information to school partners working with SIT Study Abroad on customized and faculty-led programs regarding SIT's COVID-19 protocols and best practices. Specifically, this document outlines SIT's approach to enacting COVID protocols as they pertain to customized programming, including financial implications.

The following information is accurate as of **April 30, 2021** and is subject to change. When and if protocols or best practices change or are updated, partners will be notified on a timely basis.

Students, their families, faculty leaders, and partner institutions are encouraged to contact SIT if they have any questions about SIT's protocols or if they require supplemental information pertaining to a specific country or host community.

1. SIT COVID-19 Protocols: Faculty leaders and students participating in SIT Custom Programs are expected to adhere to the COVID-19 Emergency Protocols in place for SIT's own programs. A copy of these protocols can be found here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/risk-management/covid-19-emergency-protocols/>. As changes are made to these protocols, SIT will update the information on its website and communicate updates to partners.
2. Until further notice, SIT has suspended homestays, independent travel, and international excursions due to COVID-19.
 - a. If an approved custom program budget includes homestays and the above policy is still in place 90 days in advance of the program start date, SIT will adjust the budget and program plan accordingly, in collaboration with school partners. In most cases, this will result in an additional cost.
 - b. If an approved custom program budget includes an international excursion and the above policy is still in place 90 days in advance of the program start date, SIT will adjust the budget and program plan accordingly and notify partners of any changes to the program cost.
3. COVID-19 Vaccination
 - a. Currently, SIT encourages faculty leaders and students to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 prior to participating in an SIT Custom Program. Beginning in Fall 2021, SIT will **require** faculty leaders and student participants to be fully vaccinated prior to participating in an SIT Custom Program. Recognizing that not all international students will have access to vaccines by Fall 2021, SIT asks that international students who wish to travel and who do not have access to a vaccine apply for an accommodation as noted below.
 - b. Exemption from Vaccination: Students in need of an exemption from SIT's COVID-19 vaccination policy due to a medical reason, or because of a sincerely held religious belief, must submit a completed Immunization Exemption Form. Accommodations will be granted where they do not cause undue hardship or pose a direct threat to the health and safety of others. Students based in countries outside of the United States where vaccines are not yet available may also request an exemption by

submitting an Immunization Exemption Form. Any exemptions are contingent on vaccinations not being mandated by host country governments as a requirement for entry.

- c. Vaccination Verification: Students will be asked to verify their vaccination status during the pre-departure process.
4. Pre-Departure Orientation(s): One or more pre-departure orientation sessions may be required for each SIT custom program during the weeks preceding the start of the program to help orient, educate, and brief students on COVID-19 and our country-specific Risk Management Plans.
5. COVID-19 Testing: Students and faculty leaders may be required to undergo COVID tests prior to departure, upon arrival, and at the end of the program, depending on current SIT protocols, home country government guidelines, and host country restrictions.
 - a. Pre-Departure Testing
 - i. Students and faculty undertake any required pre-departure COVID testing at their own expense. SIT can provide guidance, if needed, on how to obtain this COVID testing.
 - ii. Students and/or faculty leaders whose pre-departure COVID tests are positive will not be allowed to travel or to participate in the program. In such cases, SIT's normal refund policy will apply.
 - b. Testing Upon Arrival to Host Country
 - i. SIT will manage testing logistics. If COVID tests are required upon arrival, this will add to the program budget unless already included in the approved the program budget.
 - ii. Students and/or faculty leaders whose COVID tests upon arrival in the host country are positive will be required to quarantine and isolate. SIT staff can provide support to impacted students and/or faculty leaders, as needed. Partner institutions will be responsible for any associated expense not already included as part of the approved program budget. SIT will work to provide students and/or faculty leaders access to program content virtual format, where and if possible. With limited exceptions, no refunds will be provided for program activities missed by students and/or faculty leaders due to a required quarantine and isolation period.
 - c. End of Program Testing
 - i. For students returning to the United States at the end of the program, effective January 26, 2021, all airline passengers entering the United States, ages two years and older, must provide a negative COVID-19 PCR test result that is taken within three calendar days of planned departure. Students returning to destinations other than the U.S. are responsible for knowing what will be required of them based on where they are traveling.
 - ii. SIT will manage testing logistics. However, the cost of these tests may be at an additional cost unless already included in the approved program budget.
 - iii. If a student and/or faculty leader tests positive at the end of the program or at another time that would prevent them from leaving the program country on the program end date as

originally planned, SIT will assist the affected students and/or faculty/leaders in finding room and board during the isolation period and in offering logistical support. However, any SIT support provided after the program end date is not typically covered in SIT's custom program contracts. Therefore, there may be an additional cost for these extended services. Impacted individuals will also be responsible for paying the cost of accommodation, food, transport, airline change fees, and any other costs associated with an extended stay beyond the program dates and therefore not covered in the approved program budget.

- iv. For those programs using SIT's insurance plan, this insurance will automatically extend in the event that a student or faculty leader needs to stay in the program location longer than anticipated due to a positive COVID test. SIT will cover the additional insurance coverage up to a maximum of two (2) weeks of additional coverage. After that time, students and/or faculty leaders will be responsible for any additional insurance costs incurred as a result of an extended in-country stay due to COVID

d. Additional Testing

- i. Students and/or faculty leaders who display COVID symptoms will be tested, at their own additional expense, and will isolate while awaiting results. Any students or faculty leaders who may have been exposed to COVID-19 will likewise be tested, at their own additional cost, and supported while they remain isolated until a healthcare provider indicates it is safe to rejoin the group. When possible, SIT will deliver virtual program content to those in isolation virtually, though this may not be available in all locations or for all activities. With limited exceptions, no refunds will be provided for program activities missed by students and/or faculty leaders due to a required quarantine and isolation period.
- ii. If the test result is positive, affected students and/or faculty leaders will not be able to continue with program activities until such a time that an appropriate healthcare professional indicates that it is safe to rejoin the group. SIT program staff will continue to support students during any necessary quarantine period.
- iii. SIT will assist with testing logistics. However, the cost of these tests will be an additional charge unless already included in the approved program budget.

6. Quarantine

- a. Students and/or faculty leaders may need to undergo a multi-day quarantine period at a controlled location upon arrival in the host country. SIT will remain in close communication with partners regarding quarantine requirements for their program and how it may impact the program schedule and approved budget. Students will use this time for program orientation sessions and will participate in program activities virtually. SIT will work closely with partners on a plan that presents the least disruption possible to the overall program schedule.
- b. Should additional quarantine be needed for any reason during the program (e.g., due to exposure to a positive case of COVID-19, presentation of potential COVID-19 symptoms, and/or a positive COVID test), SIT will manage logistics. However, additional costs associated with this additional quarantine that are not included as part of the approved program budget will be an additional cost. With limited exceptions, no refunds will be provided for program activities missed by students and/or faculty leaders.

- c. In the event that faculty leaders are required to isolate, SIT will step into a lead role, where and as appropriate, to ensure continuation of program delivery.

7. COVID-19 Precautions

- a. All SIT Custom Programs will follow COVID precautions and protocols as outlined in SIT's COVID-19 Emergency Protocols.
- b. SIT will provide face masks and cleaning/sanitizing supplies for self-use throughout the program during all program-sponsored activities. The cost of these face masks and cleaning/sanitizing supplies is included in all SIT custom program budgets.
- c. An elevated level of cleanliness and sanitation will be maintained at all SIT program centers and classroom spaces utilized by SIT custom programs in accordance with local public health guidelines and requirements. For programs utilizing SIT program centers, this service will be provided at no additional cost to partners. For programs utilizing alternative classroom space, we will notify partners of any potential costs not accounted for in the program budget.
- d. Program-sponsored excursions and field visits around the host community will be undertaken using private transportation methods which will adhere to elevated sanitation standards. If changes to the transportation are needed (e.g., to minimize passenger capacity per bus or to switch from a plan to use public transportation to private transportation) this may increase the overall program budget.

8. Program Cancellation & Interruption Due to COVID: In the event a program needs to be cancelled due to COVID, the following will apply to all custom programs:

- a. Before the Program Start Date: In the event that a program needs to be cancelled due to COVID-19, transitioning to a virtual version of the program may be possible depending on the date of program cancellation and whether a virtual contingency plan has already been prepared. Otherwise, the cancellation policy as agreed to by partners in the program contract will be implemented.
- b. After the Program Start Date: In the event that a SIT Custom Program be cancelled after the program has already begun partners will arrange to send students home as quickly as possible and the cancellation policy as agreed to by partners in the program contract will be implemented.

Best Practices for Risk Mitigation

Generally, the following best practices will be maintained on all SIT custom programs around the world. Recognizing that this is an evolving situation, these guidelines may be expanded or eased in the future in accordance with the instruction of relevant public health authorities in the host location together with the assessment of SIT's Risk Management Team.

Masks, Hand Sanitizing & Physical Distancing

Similar to the practices with which most of us are already familiar, students and SIT-affiliated persons will be advised, wherever possible, to maintain distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) between themselves and other people. Masks will be worn in all public spaces, classrooms, and common areas. Hand sanitizer and masks will be provided regularly by SIT to those who need them.

Classrooms & Learning Spaces

When and where possible, classes at SIT program centers abroad will make use of secure outdoor spaces where students can maintain the recommended physical distancing in an open-air environment. When being indoors is necessary, every effort will be made to maintain physical distancing, sanitation, and reduce the potential risk of transmission. Site-specific measures will depend on local public health guidelines.

Meals

Students will receive all meals in secure settings that align with elevated sanitation standards and local and national public health guidelines.

Housing

While homestays with local families are an integral part of some of our customized programs, we recognize that homestays in the present situation could expose students and our host communities to an elevated level of risk. Considering this, homestay families might not be possible in certain locations. If it is determined that homestays will not be possible in a given location, we will work with partner institutions to identify appropriate alternative lodging. However, a switch from homestays to alternative lodging may increase the program cost. Our on-site program staff will plan to incorporate, at no additional cost, alternative cultural immersion activities with locals into the program schedule to facilitate other opportunities for intercultural awareness.

Pre-Departure Planning

Prior to students departing for their program location, SIT will give a virtual briefing to students about the situation on the ground, the protocols in place and then answer student questions and concerns.

In addition, SIT advises all students to self-isolate during the two weeks preceding their travels abroad to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 prior to their international air travel. SIT also encourages students and faculty leaders to get tested for COVID as close as possible to the departure date. SIT will inform students and faculty leaders on both SIT and host government testing requirements. Students and faculty leaders are expected to be informed of and follow any testing requirements of airlines. As stated earlier, a quarantine period at a secure location may be built into the start of the program schedule upon arrival overseas.

Independent Travel & Visitors

SIT generally discourages visitors during custom programs and asks students and faculty leaders to take a cautious approach to independent travel. We do so for reasons of student safety and security as well as the limited time available to students for travel on a short-term customized program. During the present pandemic, no outside visitors from students' or faculty leader's home communities may come to visit with them at their program sites abroad and independent travel may be restricted or limited. Furthermore, any requests for independent travel within the local region of the host country should only be pursued if public health authorities in the host country indicate that such activity would be safe.

Program-sponsored Excursions

SIT programs will continue to include educational excursions and field visits to sites as agreed upon with our partner schools. Travel will take place by way of private transportation methods which adhere to elevated sanitation standards. Program excursions and field visits may be modified to adapt to site-specific COVID realities. In some cases, it may be necessary to replace planned excursions with alternative program activities. Excursions which planned to cross international borders may be replaced with in-country opportunities. Any recommended or required modifications will be communicated to partner schools, faculty leaders, and students as early as possible.

International Flights

Students are responsible for their own flights to and from their study abroad locations. SIT encourages students to purchase Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) insurance coverage for their international air travels. Such coverage can

often be purchased through the airline and/or travel provider. Students should be sure to contact the CFAR travel insurance provider to ask questions and verify that it meets their needs.

Potential Escalation of COVID-19 in Host Country

Throughout the program, SIT will be closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation in each location and will be communicating with students and partners any changes that may occur. Each program's COVID-19 Risk Management Plan will specifically address what actions will take place if someone gets sick or conditions change to the point where it is no longer safe to run the program as planned. Depending on the local realities of each situation, different solutions may be applied including, but not limited to, program cancellation, temporary isolation of the group, and continuing program activities online.

Post-Program Planning

After the conclusion of their program abroad, SIT advises all students to be tested for COVID-19 upon their return home and to remain in self-isolation until a negative test result is received. By limiting their contact with people upon their immediate return home, students will reduce the risk of potentially spreading illnesses to their home communities.