

# SRISA



## PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK





### **ABOUT THE DESIGNER**

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# PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK

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# 1

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BENVENUTI! WELCOME!**

If you are reading this Pre-Departure Handbook that means you are preparing to embark on a life changing experience studying abroad in Florence, Italy with Santa Reparata International School of Art (SRISA)! We at SRISA are delighted to have the opportunity to become your home-away-from-home for a month, semester or extended term. This handbook is a compilation of information gathered over the decades of hosting students and visiting faculty.

### **ABOUT SRISA**

SRISA is an independent non-profit school that provides accredited academic-year and semester programs, short workshops, and summer classes of the highest caliber. The curricula and class schedules are based on the American University model and are taught in English, however, students come from many countries and cultural backgrounds. Alongside its own academic program, SRISA hosts numerous visiting University and independent programs throughout the year.

### **ABOUT FLORENCE**

Shortly, you will be one among millions who have chosen Florence, Italy as their home for study abroad. What draws so many people to this Renaissance town? The real question is, what doesn't! It is the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance, having been home to such masters as Giotto, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo and many, many others. Established around 59 BC as a Roman settlement, Florence has an extremely rich culture and history that is present still today.

Florence, Firenze in Italian, officially became an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982 thanks to its overwhelming amount of historically important artistic and architectural masterpieces, many of which exist thanks to the profuse patronage of the Medici Family. We invite you to learn more on the official city of Florence webpage: <http://en.comune.fi.it>

## ITALY AT A GLANCE

- Official Name: Italian Republic (Repubblica Italiana)
- Population: Just under 60,000,000
- Language: Italian
- Religion: Roman Catholic
- Currency: Euro
- Capital: Rome
- Unification: March 17, 1861



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## PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

### OBTAINING A PASSPORT

Applications for new passports or renewals should be done far in advance of your departure date. While it is possible to expedite the process for an extra fee plus overnight postage, it is best to allow several months for processing. The following are basic requirements for the passport application. Specifics may vary from region to region so be sure to contact your post office directly to find out the details. If you already have a passport, make sure it is valid for at least three months after your travel dates.

### NEW PASSPORTS

- Completed application form
- 2 professional passport photos
- Proof of citizenship (birth certificate, social security)
- \$135.00 government fee (as of 2017)

### RENEWALS

- Completed application form
- 2 professional passport photos
- Most recent passport
- \$110.00 government fee (as of 2017)

The following site has useful information on the application process, current fees and processing time. You are also able to review your application status:

<http://travel.state.gov/passport/>

## PURCHASING AIRFARE

It is the responsibility of each student to make his/her own travel arrangements. You may wish to have a travel agent help you with your travel plans. There are many different options for purchasing your tickets and it is important to choose the one which best suits your needs. These are a few options that you can explore.

### **STA TRAVEL [www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com)**

STA travel is a very useful resource as they offer many other travel services aside from the role of travel agent. The purchase of an International Student Identity Card provides discounts on select sites, hotels and restaurants as well as budget airfares. The card also offers travel insurance options and emergency service hotlines. Visit their website to find the closest retail office.

**Online flight agencies** are a convenient and often cheaper way of purchasing airline tickets; these are just a few to get started with:

[www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)

[www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)

[www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com)

[www.flycheap.com](http://www.flycheap.com)

[www.skyscanner.com](http://www.skyscanner.com)

We recommend flying into the Florence airport for the convenience factor. Although flights arriving into major cities such as Rome and Milan may be less expensive, make sure to calculate supplemental transportation to Florence. After you calculate the expenses of additional trains, buses, and taxi fares you may find that it makes your trip less complicated and more efficient to fly directly into Florence. Also be sure to include Pisa and Bologna airports in your searches as they tend to have good flights and are just an hour or so from Florence.

Once you have purchased your ticket, make sure to review your flight company's rules and regulations for check-in, luggage limitations, etc.!



## **TRAVEL & MEDICAL INSURANCE**

It is important to check with your medical provider and insurance company to ascertain which expenses that you may incur while in Europe are covered. We highly recommend that you purchase short-term travel insurance to supplement your current medical plan.

Travel insurance generally covers these four basic areas:

1. Medical/health problems
2. Property loss
3. Trip cancellation/interruption
4. Emergency evacuation

A few companies that you can look in to are HTH Worldwide and Travel Insured International:

[www.hthtravelinsurance.com](http://www.hthtravelinsurance.com)  
[www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com)

All students studying in Florence are required to have health insurance that covers their stay in Italy. A local plan is available (not valid outside of Italy) for the application of their Permit of Stay. This plan covers students should they need to take a trip to the emergency room (pronto soccorso) and may be used for minor issues as well as real emergencies. This can be purchased at:

<http://secure.eduitalia.org/insurance>

Students requiring special medications **MUST BRING THEM** and carry them in their original pharmacy containers as well as the prescription itself. Do not have medicine shipped from home, as it will be promptly stopped in customs. There are 24-hour pharmacies in each section of the city and a nearby tourist clinic with English-speaking physicians should additional prescriptions or medical assistance be needed.



## PREPARING YOUR FINANCES

### The EURO

In January of 2002, twelve countries of the European Union (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland) converted their currency to the Euro. The Euro fluctuates greatly depending on the international market. In the past few years €1 has been as high as \$1.66 USD and as low as \$1.10 USD. The most up to date exchange rates can be found online at [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

### Cash

It is important to have enough foreign currency for the first 24 to 48 hours of your trip. You should plan on having approximately €100 to pay for cab rides from the airport to the school and possibly school to your apartment, as well as cash for any other issues that could arise when traveling.

We do not recommend bringing your home currency to change while in Florence, however, if you do it is always best to go to a post office. Although there are change offices all over Florence, they charge a commission and their exchange rate is usually quite high. This rule also applies to hotels, airports, and train stations where rates are usually higher than the exchange at a post office.

### Credit cards

Credit cards are generally accepted all over Italy although some smaller shops will only accept cash. Credit cards can also provide cash advances through ATM machines. Although there will be a transaction fee (around \$5 for the advance and 2-4% extra for foreign transactions), having the option available can prove to be a great relief in event of an emergency. In order to make cash advances with your credit card, contact your credit card company to obtain a Personal Identification Number (PIN).

### ATM & Debit Cards

ATM machines (*Bancomat* in Italian) are quite common in Italy and are easy to find and use. Before leaving home check with your bank to make sure you have an international PIN code and that your card is compatible with Europe's systems. A few things to keep in mind:

- Most bank machines have a cash limit (\$300, sometimes less) and all transactions will be accompanied with a surcharge depending on your bank.

- You will not be able to see your bank statement on the receipt so be sure to keep track of your withdrawals.
- Although Bancomats are readily available in Italy, they are also frequently unreliable if the phone lines or computer links aren't working.

Although convenient, debit cards can be risky. If your card is stolen and used to charge, the money is NOT recoverable (up to a maximum stated by your bank) whereas a credit card company will not charge you for purchases made with your stolen card. If you have a Debit card and find it indispensable, be aware of the risks and exercise caution. You may want to keep it in a safe place while it is not in use.

Note: For either Credit or Debit Cards, make sure to call into your bank before your departure to inform them you will be using your card outside of the country for the period of your travels. If you do not, you risk having a block placed on your account.

### **Italian Bank Card**

SRISA's educational partners at Eduitalia offer the possibility for international students to open an Italian Bank Account and receive an Italian debit card for their semesters abroad. This would allow you to wire money from your personal bank to your Italian Bank and withdraw Euro without international ATM fees. International ATM fees can add up causing students to spend much more than anticipated while abroad. Questions regarding the Italian Bank Account may be addressed to [info@edu-services.org](mailto:info@edu-services.org).

### **Traveler's Checks**

Traveler's checks were once an easy and safe way to carry money while traveling but are essentially obsolete and you are not likely to find a place in Florence that will change them for you.

The most important thing to remember is NEVER LIMIT YOUR FUNDS TO ONE OPTION. It is absolutely essential to have a backup source of money readily available. If you rely on one bankcard alone and it is stolen, you will have no means to access your money.



## WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND

- Safety begins when you pack. To avoid being a target, dress conservatively. Avoid wearing expensive looking jewelry. While Italians tend to be well dressed, a flashy wardrobe or one that is too casual can mark you as a tourist.
- Always try to travel light. You can move more quickly and will be more likely to have a free hand. You will also be less tired and less likely to set your luggage down, leaving it unattended.
- Carry the minimum amount of valuables necessary for your trip and designate a place to conceal them. Your passport, cash and credit cards are most secure when locked in a hotel safe. When you have to carry them on your person, you may wish to conceal them in several places rather than putting them all in one wallet or pouch. Avoid handbags and outside pockets that are easy targets for thieves. Inside pockets and a sturdy shoulder bag with the strap worn across your chest tend to be safer. One of the safest places to carry valuables during travel is in a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing.
- If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair. Bring them and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage. Medicines may not be sent into Italy while you are abroad, so make sure to bring enough for your travels.
- To avoid problems when passing through customs, keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. Bring copies of your prescriptions and the generic names for the drugs. If a medication is unusual or contains narcotics, you may wish to carry a letter from your doctor attesting to your need for taking the drug. If you have any doubt about the legality of carrying a certain drug into a country, consult the embassy or consulate of that country first.
- Consider getting a Skype.com account. Calling online with Skype is one of the cheapest ways to keep in touch with friends and family back home.

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home:

- Valuable or expensive-looking jewelry
- Irreplaceable family objects
- Any unnecessary credit cards
- Social Security card, library cards, and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet.

Leave a copy of your itinerary, important documents, and the school's contact information with family or friends in case they need to contact you in the event of an emergency.

## **HELPFUL HINTS FOR STUDY ABROAD**

### **Language & Culture**

Florence is a city rich in tourism and you will discover quickly that many people speak English. However, you should remember that Italian is the native language and you will find that your efforts to communicate in Italian will be warmly appreciated. It is a good idea to buy a pocket dictionary of helpful words and phrases before leaving so as to feel comfortable speaking the first few days after your arrival. Italy is a country steeped in tradition and passion for life. You will be amazed at the zest and enthusiasm Italians hold for the simple pleasures in life. The most important thing to bring with you when studying abroad is an open mind. As in travel to any new culture there will be differences. If you have patience and are accepting of these differences you will find your experience in Italy all the more rewarding.

### **Culture Shock**

When you arrive you may feel a bit disoriented, overwhelmed and/or nervous. This is what is called 'culture shock.' The feeling generally goes away after a few days but give yourself time to rest when you first arrive; it takes longer than you think to adjust to your new environment and get over the lingering effects of jetlag and homesickness.

### **Combating Jetlag**

1. Sleep and drink plenty of water on the plane.
2. Eat a full meal & drink lots of water when you arrive. (Helps your body reenergize.)
3. Don't go to bed immediately after you arrive, try to stay awake until about 10 or 11pm. (If you don't you could find yourself wide-awake at 4 am.)
4. Take a walk around town to soak in as much daylight as possible.

## HELPFUL TIPS WHILE TRAVELING

- All important documents should be photocopied and the copies should be kept in separate places. This includes: passport, student visa, credit cards (front and back), driver's license, traveler's insurance, airline tickets, etc. Make copies for yourself to leave at home and save digitally for easy access.
- When traveling be sure to have at least two forms of identification with you at all times, one with a photo ID.
- Losing luggage is a rite of passage that at some point we all must go through. By traveling to Italy you may encounter this problem sooner than you think! Always pack a change of clothes in your carry on bag, and the items you think you could not do without for a night, possibly a few days- this PARTICULARLY includes items such as prescription medicine. Always pack your valuables such as computers and camera equipment in your carry-on.
- Make sure that your carry-on luggage is "airline friendly". This means no scissors or cutting implements of any kind, no metal nail files, and no Swiss Army knife! Check the carry on allowances with your airline company ahead of time.
- Put your name, address, and phone number along with SRISA's Florence address and number where it can be found easily on all luggage.
- If your bag is lost report it to the airline before leaving and provide the name and number of the school where it can be delivered upon arrival. You will receive a receipt of the report for reference.
- Make sure that all your travel documents are in a secure but accessible place throughout the trip, as you will need to show them frequently.
- If you can't comfortably carry your bag across the room, it is too heavy.
- Read all of the information that we have sent out to you -- and a couple of travel guides too -- to help prepare for just about any situation as soon as you arrive.
- Be patient--living in Italy can be a challenging new experience and you might find that simple tasks are a little more difficult and time consuming than at home. "Pazienza!"
- Buy a good map and take it with you when you go out walking. If you get lost--especially at night, find the address where you are and use your cell phone to call a taxi (055 4390 / 055 4242 / 055 4798).

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## HOUSING AND ARRIVAL INFORMATION

### HOUSING INFORMATION

#### **Shared Student Apartments**

SRISA works closely with a housing agency in Florence to procure apartments for students. Although the apartments may vary widely, all are equipped with the following:

- Kitchen with refrigerator, stove, and either a microwave or oven
- Dishes, pots, pans, flatware and glasses, etc.
- Bathroom with shower and/or bath
- Double and/or single occupancy bedrooms

**\* You must bring your own towels and twin sheet set; they are not provided \***

All apartments are furnished and have exact beds to accommodate students assigned to them. Students that have particular needs—especially with regard to amount of space, luxuries, etc—may want to arrange their own housing. Though apartments vary in size, configuration and amenities, no student apartments are air-conditioned, none have telephones and a few do not have washing machines. Landlords provide internet connection, although it is not uncommon for it to be slow and troublesome. All apartments are centrally located and within walking distance to the school; most are within a short walk, and none are more than twenty minutes away by foot.

#### **When will I know my housing arrangement?**

Students choosing either a shared or private apartment will be sent housing information by email approximately two weeks before classes begin. This information will include:

- Information on arriving in Florence
- Apartment location
- Roommate assignments

## Apartment Tips...

- No student apartments are air-conditioned (there should be a rotary fan in each bedroom during summer months), and in the winter the heat is turned on November 1 and off April 1, as per Italian law. You need to bring warm clothes for the fall, winter, and spring months.
- Florence is an old city and the water pressure, electrical systems, etc, are sometimes not as efficient as in the States. There is little to be done about this but learn to live with minor inconveniences and things that sometimes happen even when staying in a hotel.
- There are often mosquitoes in the city. As it is not Italian custom to use mosquito netting/window screens, be prepared.! You can purchase a wide variety of mosquito repelling devices while here.
- Florence can be a very noisy city. If you have trouble sleeping with city noise, bring earplugs.
- For appliances such as hair dryers, irons, etc. it is better to buy them in Italy, as you will save yourself a little travel weight and the hassle of having to use an electrical converter. They also tend to be the number one cause of a blown fuse! However, if you must bring a hair dryer, etc. with you, bring a converter as well. Or try to buy appliances that have built-in conversion. If you have an appliance with an American plug you will need an adapter for the plug -- easily bought at any hardware or electrical supply store or directly in Florence for around 2-5 Euro.
- All apartments are in residential buildings, not dormitories. Your neighbors may be a family with young children or early rising businessmen. Please respect these shared conditions.



## ARRIVAL IN FLORENCE

It is highly recommended that you arrange a flight that arrives directly into Florence. This will reduce the fatigue of your journey and will also avoid extra travel and hotel expense when you depart. If you can't find a flight directly to Florence, check for a ticket to Pisa or Bologna as they are both quite convenient and transport to Florence is only about 1 hour.



## **Arrival at the Florence Airport & Getting to the school**

When you arrive in Florence you will either arrive at the airport or the Santa Maria Novella train station. In either case, you will take a taxi (conveniently waiting outside the door) to the school to pick up the keys to your apartment. The cost for the taxi ride should be from €12-25. The taxi ride from the airport is a fixed €22 price plus €1 for each bag. Ask the taxi driver to go to: Via San Gallo 53/red (red numbers) Phone: 055-500-0380. After checking in and getting your keys, a staff member will accompany you to your apartment.

**IMPORTANT!!** Check-in Times: The office at SRISA is open from 9am to 6pm Monday through Friday. If you arrive over the weekend or after business hours you must make your own arrangements to stay in a hotel. It is extremely important that you notify us of your flight number, arrival time and date. If you do not have the information when you apply please notify us as soon as possible by email to: [housing@srisa.org](mailto:housing@srisa.org). Before booking your ticket, remember to consult your housing information for specific check-in and check-out times.

## **Hotels in Florence**

Florence has many hotels but here is a short list of hotels close to the school for those arriving early or after school hours.

Hotel Royan\*\*\* [www.hotelroyalfirenze.it](http://www.hotelroyalfirenze.it) Tel: 055-483287

Piccolo Hotel\*\* [www.piccolo.hotelinfirenze.com](http://www.piccolo.hotelinfirenze.com) Tel: 055-475519

Tourist House Liberty B&B [www.touristhouseliberty.it](http://www.touristhouseliberty.it) Tel: 055-471759

Wow Hostel [www.wowflorence.com](http://www.wowflorence.com) Tel: 055-579603

## **Arrival in Rome**

Flights into Rome arrive at the Da Vinci Airport at Fiumicino, a town to the west of Rome. From the airport there is a train that runs every 30 minutes to the Rome central train station called ROMA TERMINI. When you exit the Arrivals area of the airport, you will walk or take the elevator to the upper level and follow signs for the trains. Tickets cost around €14 and are available at the office just before the track area and also from the ticket machines. There may be a couple of stops along the way, at Roma Trastevere for example, but you need to stay on the train until the final stop at ROMA TERMINI. The ride will take about 35 minutes. If, for whatever reason, you do not want to use the train service into Rome, there are taxis and airport limos available. The trip takes 30-40 minutes and the cost is about €50.

Once at the Roma Termini station you will need to transfer to a train for Florence SMN station. Tickets for Florence can be purchased at either the airport or Roma Termini stations. Depending on whether you take a Regional (slower, 3.5-4 hrs) train or Freccia (faster, 1.5 hrs) train, the price can vary from €25-50.

## **Arrival at Milan Malpensa Airport**

Malpensa is the arrival airport for trans-Atlantic flights arriving in Milan. The procedure for arrival in Milan is similar to the one for Rome. Depending on the time of day, you have 3 choices to get to MILANO CENTRALE train station:

**Train:** The Malpensa Express departs frequently from the airport between the hours of 5:45 AM to 10:55 PM and takes about 1-1.5 hrs. The cost is €12.

**Shuttle bus:** These operate on a 24 hour schedule with approximately 20 minute intervals, depending on the hours of the day, and take about 1 hour to arrive at the station. The cost is €10 or €16 round trip.

**Taxi:** The cost for a taxi from the airport to the train station is €65-75 and the ride takes about 50 minutes.

## **Arrival at Milan Linate Airport**

If you arrive from another European country there is a good chance your flight will arrive at Linate Airport. Again, you have choices of transportation to get to the MILANO CENTRALE station. Travel time is approximately 75 minutes:

**Taxi:** Available outside the Arrival level.

**Coach:** There is an airport coach service which runs to the Air Terminal at Milan Central Station.

## **Other Arrival Cities**

If you are arriving in another Italian city (particularly for those who will be traveling before school begins) such as Pisa, Bologna, Genova, etc., the procedure is essentially like the one for Rome and Milan.

## **Buying Train Tickets**

PLEASE NOTE: Italian train information, hours, and pricing can be found at either [www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it) or [www.italotreno.it](http://www.italotreno.it)

Tickets can be purchased online or in the stations at the ticket machines or information booths (most of the train clerks at the station speak English so do not worry about having to explain yourself in Italian).

From the train station of your location you will need to buy a ticket to FIRENZE SMN (Santa Maria Novella) station, the main station in Florence.

Posted in all Italian train stations there are large yellow and white timetables, located along or at the end of the platforms. One will be the 'PARTENZE' (departures) and the other 'ARRIVI' (arrivals). At the left of the timetable are the times of departures and arrivals of the various trains. Read across to see when and where the train will stop. Also included: Binario (Bin, this is the track number); a small sign for a bed indicates that there are sleeping facilities; 1-2 means first and second class service; a knife and fork indicates that there is a dining car.

Remember that in Europe, all trains run on a 24 hour clock or military time: for example, 2:00 PM is 14:00 and 12:30 AM is 00:30. Reading down the chart, all of the trains leaving will be listed chronologically at the left.

Depending on the time of your arrival and/or your travel desires, there are a variety of trains running daily to and from Florence. The most reliable trains to choose are the Freccia trains. These cost more but they are the fastest and most efficient.

To go to Florence you may be boarding a train with a destination beyond Florence (such as Milan, Venice, etc.). Make sure that the train you choose makes a stop at FIRENZE SMN (Santa Maria Novella).

Once you have purchased your ticket, find out which track (binario) the train departs from and at what time. This information is also on the 'PARTENZE' timetable, but it is best to check the main board overhead, as sometimes the regular tracks can change.

Validate your ticket by stamping it at one of the validation machines in the station, or at the head of the track. Remember to do this! There are large fines to pay to the conductor if you do not validate your ticket before boarding the train.

Regional trains do not make seat assignments, so you may sit wherever you find a place. However, for those on the Freccia trains or anyone who decides to make a reservation on an Inter-city train, your ticket will include a seat reservation. For the Freccia trains this reservation is automatic. Find the car number and the seat assignment, and go to that seat. Don't worry if someone tries to take your place – your ticket assures that the seat is yours!

When you arrive at Firenze SMN, take a taxi to the school as described above.

A Note of CAUTION about taxis: Beware of non-metered cabs!

At some airports and stations there are non-official cabs that will offer to take you into the city, but are not metered. Do not ride in a non-metered cab, even if they tell you that the price is the same or better. It usually isn't!!



# 4

## GENERAL TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

### Trains

There are various kinds of trains in Italy. From the fastest to the slowest, these are:

**Freccia** (Rossa, Argento and Bianco): These are Italy's fastest trains with economy, premium, business and executive classes. These super fast trains with direct connections and very few stops, are more expensive than the other trains but worth the price. Special discounts may apply when tickets are purchased online in advance. They are air conditioned and generally have a restaurant or snack car.

**Intercity** (IC): These trains provide normal, first and second-class service, making stops in most mid-sized cities. They are a good financial alternative to the rapid trains, but still fairly efficient. Also air-conditioned, usually with a bar/restaurant car as well. Beware of delays!

Overnight Express trains, or variations thereof, with couchettes (or Wagon Lit) for sleeping.

**Regionale** (R) trains are relatively local and make numerous stops. They are good for short trips or when you are not in a hurry. They tend not to have air-conditioning or restaurant cars and may add several hours on to your trip.

**'Direct'** (D) or "Locale", are actually not very direct at all, these trains are very slow and make many stops. These trains are the cheapest alternative. They are older and more picturesque, but have no services or amenities.

If you are traveling with a group and want a compartment, you can get a reservation (it costs extra). Word to the wise: except for the automatic reservations with the Freccia trains, you cannot get a reservation on the day you travel. Check outside the compartment when you get on the train to see if it is reserved.

## **Storing Bags while at the Station**

Many, but not all, train stations have places to store luggage – Deposito Bagagli. These are safe and easy to use, with the obvious exception of valuables such as cameras and purses, which should be kept with you.

## **Taxis - General information**

It is not easy to hail a taxi on the street in Italy, but it is possible. The easiest places to find a taxi are at the airports, train stations, or other major public spaces, where there are official taxi stands/stops and taxis are always waiting for passengers. Select locations around town include: Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza San Marco, Porta Romana, Santa Maria Novella, Piazza Santa Trinita, and behind the Duomo Cathedral.

The general Italian system is to call for a Taxi and dispatchers usually speak English. You will declare your location, and they will locate a taxi for you. They will then give you the name of the cab (ex: Milano 33), followed by the estimated time of arrival: usually 3-5 minutes. While tipping is not necessary, it is courteous to round up on the price as a tip to the driver, or to offer 5-10%, but do not worry if you don't have the right change, in general, tipping in Italy is not necessary, and people do not expect it.

## **Buses - General Information**

There are two types of buses:

1. Local city buses (called ATAF in Florence)

2. Inter-city buses which are run by various companies. You will find these similar to the Greyhound system in the U.S.

All buses use a ticket-validation system: you validate your ticket when you board the bus. If you have not done so and a conductor arrives, you will be assessed a fine.

Tickets for local buses can be purchased at any tabacchi shop (sells tobacco, stamps, etc), at most newsstands, some bars, or at street machines as well as on board for an additional fee. There are various choices of tickets: one ride or one and a half hours; multiple-rides or Carta Agile; or longer-term passes, such as for one month.

## **GETTING AROUND FLORENCE AND ITALY**

### **BY BUS**

A large network of bus routes serves Florence. Bus stops are marked by orange signs, (fermata) which show the bus numbers that correspond to that stop. These signs give information on the route and the directions the bus is heading. The train station is indicated by Stazione F. S. Two main bus stops are the train station and Piazza San Marco.

It is possible to catch most bus routes from these two stops.

### **BUS TICKETS**

Standard tickets cost € 1.20 for a 90-minute ride. You can also buy a four-trip ticket for the price of € 4.70. There are tickets good for three hours, 24 hours, two days, three days and seven days. If you are to stay in Florence for more than one month it is worth buying a student bus pass (about €25.00) good for unlimited city bus travel for one month. All types of bus tickets can be purchased at most bars, Tabacchi and newsstands. To apply for a student bus pass go to the official Student point for foreigners on V.le Gramsci 9. You will need to take your identification card. You can get information on this pass at the front desk. Please note that tickets must be validated once on the bus. (There is a € 250 fine for not validating!)

### **BUS ROUTES**

Please ask for a map of Bus Routes at the Front Desk.

### **BUS HOURS**

You can ask for a free bus schedule at the ATAF Office, in Piazza Stazione or use the timetable search found on their website: [www.ataf.net](http://www.ataf.net)

### **RULES YOU NEED TO OBSERVE WHEN RIDING THE BUS**

- Board the bus using the front and back doors not the middle door. The middle door is used for exiting the bus.
- Offer your seat to the elderly, disabled, or a mother and child etc.
- Try not to block the doors
- To signal for your stop, push one of the buttons located by the doors or on the hand bars.

### **TO THE AIRPORT**

There is a city bus that goes to PERETOLA AIRPORT. Its name is "VOLA IN BUS" (it has no number).

The Bus Stop is at the SITA STATION ("Autostazione Sita") in Via Santa Caterina da Siena (near train station). You can buy the ticket on the bus only if you have cash.

## **BY BIKE**

Some students like to buy a bike to get around town. A good place to buy a second hand bike is "Florence by Bike" in Via San Zanobi 54R. They also offer daily rentals and tours. One-day bike rentals are also available through the city of Florence. You will need to leave a document and pay a small fee. A nearby rental point is in the parking garage of the Mercato Centrale. Should you decide to use the bike to move around Florence please be aware of the traffic, which can be chaotic.

Always bring a strong bike lock with you as there are expert bike thieves around and without a lock, you may lose your bike!

## **VISITING FLORENCE SURROUNDINGS**

Places like Fiesole or Settignano can be reached by taking a city bus. To go to Fiesole you can take bus # 7, and to go to Settignano you can take bus # 10. They all depart from Piazza San Marco. To visit places outside the metropolitan area you can use both, train or regional buses.

SITA is the most convenient to reach the Chianti area and Siena because of its many departures throughout the day. The SITA bus station is located in Via Santa Caterina da Siena near the train station. Toscana Bus is another regional bus.

# 5

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### SENDING AND RECEIVING MAIL IN ITALY

All letters should be sent to the school's mailing address where they will be placed in the student mailbox - NOT to your apartment address!

(Your name)  
c/o Santa Reparata International School of Art  
Via San Gallo 53/Red  
50129 Firenze, Italia

For those of you who would like the added security of a professional agency to collect your packages, you can also have your packages shipped to:

Mail Boxes Etc. Srl  
Via San Gallo 61/Red  
50129 Firenze, Italia  
Phone: +39 055 463 0426

Packages should be addressed to you, c/o Santa Reparata International School of Art. Mailboxes Etc. is very helpful and can assist you in locating lost or missing packages if shipped to them.

The Italian postal system is fairly unreliable. Do not send rush items through the regular post. If you are in dire need of something the most efficient way is through a courier service such as Federal Express or UPS.

VERY IMPORTANT!!! When shipping packages always label the contents as 'used items,' 'personal use only' or 'gift' and give the package a low monetary value no more than 30 Euro. Otherwise, there will most likely be a very large custom fee, which often times exceeds the true value of the package! DO NOT have MEDICINE or FOOD shipped to you from the States as it will get stopped in customs.



## **POST OFFICES**

There are many post offices spread all around town. You can recognize them by a yellow circular sign with the letters PT in the centre. The main post office is located in Piazza della Repubblica and is open Monday to Saturday from 8:20 am to 7:00 pm. All other offices are open Monday to Friday from 8:15 am to 1:30 pm and on Saturday from 8:15 am until noon. All post offices close early on the last day of the month and respect public holidays. You can also visit the website for more information: [www.posteitaliane.it](http://www.posteitaliane.it)

## **CALLING IN ITALY**

### **International Calls**

Probably one of the first things you will want to do when you arrive is to call home to let everyone know you arrived safely. We have noticed that one of the best methods to call home is through the application Skype. With Skype to Skype students can call home for free or they can use it as a phone card to call a phone number back home with very good rates. The one drawback of Skype is that it is reliant on internet.

An international phone card (Scheda Telefonica Internazionale) can be purchased as well. These cards can be found in any Tabacchi store in Florence. There are many different types of cards and you will want to ask for one that has a good rate to the United States. Do note that phone booths are becoming obsolete so make sure you have a place to use a phone card before purchasing.

### **Cellular Phones**

We highly encourage all participants to have access to a cellular plan while in Italy. You can look into an international plan with your home provider or a local Italian plan. One student friendly company is Platform/Piccell, which has both local and international calling plans and data packets for cell phone and/or SIM rental. If requested in advance, these phones can be shipped to your home address to have handy during the full course of your travels. SRISA students receive discounted rates for their cell and SIM rentals making this an easy and cost efficient solution. Information about plans and pricing is provided before departure and during on-campus orientation as well as at: [www.piccellwireless.com/santareparata](http://www.piccellwireless.com/santareparata)

Cell phones and SIMs are also easily purchased from any of the general telephone providers in Italy once you are in Florence. However, be aware that various costs may be "lost in translation" as their customer service agents may not speak fluent English.

## **BUDGETING YOUR MONEY**

### **MISCELLANEOUS COSTS**

#### **Food Costs & Eating Out**

How much you spend on food will depend largely on your personal eating habits. The most economical way to eat in Italy is at home. Eating out in a restaurant can range from €10-€40. We suggest that you budget around €25 Euro a day for food.

#### **Supplies**

Some basic materials will be available for studio art courses but most are the responsibility of the student to acquire. Staple items such as paint brushes can be brought from home, but Florence is full of fabulous art stores where you can find any supply needed. Depending on your assignments and personal usage of materials, you will want to allow for a minimum of €50 per course outside of materials fees.

#### **Extra money**

Everyone's spending habits are different but we suggest that you bring about €200-400 per month for extra activities, going out and for shopping.

#### **Travel**

Many students like to take advantage of their weekends exploring their new surroundings. Between train and air travel, Italy and Europe are quite easy to navigate and SRISA offers several field trips for those that like to travel in groups. If you want to fit in as much as you can while overseas, we recommend setting aside roughly €1000 for traveling.

### **THE LIBRARY AT SANTA REPARATA**

A growing library of over 2300 volumes is especially suited to the particular needs of our students and instructors. There is a concentration in printmaking, photography, Renaissance and Gothic art history, contemporary art, Italian history and culture. The school maintains subscriptions to journals such as Art in America, Flash Art, and ArtNews. The library has been cataloged and a list of holdings is available on the SRISA website.

#### **Policy on checking out books:**

We allow books to leave the library and campus only if they have been checked out at the front desk.

The library is locked in the evenings and over the weekend. Library Hours: Monday through Friday 9AM TO 5PM.

## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

Student well-being is of primary importance to SRISA. We view each student as an individual and seek to provide each student with the environment and tools necessary to reach their goals through study abroad. The most important of your responsibilities while abroad is to take preventative measures to maintain your health and wellness. It will take some time for your body to adjust to the travel and changes in daily routine, altitude, food, and water. You may be susceptible to colds as your body adjusts to the new environment. Be sure to get enough rest and to eat balanced meals. For those who like to exercise, there are a number of gyms, sport clubs, and yoga centers in Florence.

### **Illness**

If you do become sick and need to see a doctor or pharmacist, SRISA staff will assist you in finding a clinic or local pharmacy. Note that you will need to pay for any medical costs at the time of the visit. Be sure to keep your receipts and submit them with your claim form for reimbursement with your personal insurance company. Should you have any questions about the coverage or how to fill in your claim form, contact the insurance company directly.

Note: Local Italian Health Insurance, which covers emergencies, is available for purchase from our educational partners at Eduitalia but does not have a reimbursement plan nor can it be used with private doctors.

SRISA discourages students from engaging in high-risk behavior and activities while abroad.

### **Personal Health and Prescriptions**

Speak with your doctor regarding your personal health and prescriptions before going abroad. It is recommended that students bring a sufficient supply of their prescription and over the counter medications and to continue to take them as prescribed while studying abroad. The medicines must be in their original containers and labeled accordingly. Pack all medical prescriptions in your carry-on bag along with your doctor's authorization and be prepared to answer questions about them if questioned by the airport authorities or any other officials.

All students with diagnosed medical conditions are encouraged to stipulate this on their enrollment application and to inform SRISA staff upon arriving at the campus in Florence so that we can better assist you in case of an emergency.

If you have a medical condition that is not visible (diabetes, epilepsy, drug allergies, etc.) it is advisable to wear a medic alert bracelet while abroad.

Some prescribed medications in your home country may be considered controlled substances in other countries. Please check with your home doctor and the Italian embassy to see if any of the drugs you wish to bring with you are controlled. If they are controlled, you may require special authorization to bring them into Italy. You can obtain this authorization from the Italian embassy in your home country.

### **Illegal Substances**

Please be aware that when you are abroad, you are subject to the jurisdiction of all local laws of the country you are visiting with respect to carrying or using drugs and illegal substances. Depending where you go, this may include pre-trial confinement in substandard prison conditions for months. Buying, carrying, or even accompanying friends who have even a small amount of illegal substances may result in arrest. Foreign students abroad have been jailed for possessing as little as three grams (a tenth of an ounce) of marijuana. Be aware that drug dealers, after making profit on the sale of drugs, may turn their customers in to the local authorities for a reward. Also keep in mind that trials are conducted in the host country language; lengthy delays are common; and punishment for possession or trafficking can be several years. Depending on your nationality, a local representative may attempt to ensure that a detainee's rights under local law are fully observed. They may visit the detainee and provide a list of local attorneys, but they cannot in any way intervene in a foreign country's court system.

It is also important to note that SRISA has a zero tolerance policy towards the use of illegal drugs and alcohol abuse. Should you be caught abusing alcohol, using, selling or possessing illegal drugs while studying at SRISA, you will be dismissed from the program and required to vacate your housing.

### **Personal Health Items**

We recommend bringing your own "personal health kit." Although all general health and sanitary items can be found in Italy, you likely will not find your preferred brand. For example:

**band-aids**  
**anti itch ointment**  
**anti allergy medicine**  
**altitude sickness medicine**  
**stomach or digestion medicine**  
**cold medication**

**vitamins & minerals**  
**headache relief**  
**personal hygiene care**  
**sexual health care items**  
**mosquito repellent**  
**prescription and over the counter medicines**  
**glasses, contact lenses and cleansing solution**  
**shampoo and conditioner**

# 6

## **SAFETY & EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

At SRISA, student health and safety is of utmost importance, and is taken into consideration when planning for a student's experience abroad. We have established safety protocols, a detailed orientation process, emergency response procedures, and staff training in health and safety. SRISA's safety procedures are communicated to students on the first day of their orientation in Florence, as well as in their Pre-Departure Handbook.

SRISA's Safety Team will take the lead in enacting safety procedures and communicating to students and local authorities, as well as parents, and university partners. Safety Team members are:

- Rebecca Olsen, Director
- Alexandra Rojas, Associate Director
- Laelle Busch, Registrar

### **SRISA EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN**

The SRISA Emergency Response Plan identifies key decision makers and their roles, and the procedures utilized during a national or international crisis such as civil disturbances, pandemics, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and wars.

The SRISA Safety Team utilizes various resources when making decisions about how to respond in a national or local emergency. Resources include the website and notifications from the U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassy in Rome, AACUPI and other study abroad organizations, World Health Organization, as well as local police and authorities. Team members subscribe to the State Department's travel advisory list and receive all announcements about travel warnings and advisories. These are shared with the appropriate staff members in Florence.

We encourage students to play an active part in staying safe and informed. Students are:

- Required to inform SRISA of their weekend travel plans by giving this information to our designated staff member.
- Asked to be available over email, Facebook, and/or telephone so that SRISA can get in touch if necessary.
- Encouraged to stay updated with local and international governmental protocols and to check the US Embassy websites and the U.S. Department of State website.
- Requested to enroll in the US Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive automatic alerts and register with their database: <https://step.state.gov/step/> and to review the State Department's Students Abroad website <http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>

## **GROUP EMERGENCIES**

In the event of a serious school, city, or nationwide emergency, a number of steps will be taken:

- 1.** Depending on the situation, SRISA may gather students together in the campus buildings. This is dependent on the type of threat or situation. Otherwise, students should immediately go to their apartments where they should stay away from windows. If returning to the apartment is not possible, students should go to the nearest hotel or establishment.
- 2.** Once secure in one of the above safe locations, students should contact SRISA either by phone (emergency numbers provided at Orientation) or by Internet (email [info@srisa.org](mailto:info@srisa.org) or private message on SRISA's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/santa.reparata>) to confirm their location and safety. SRISA will reach out to students who have not been in contact.
- 3.** Students should remain in the safe location until SRISA staff provides further instructions in relation to the event at hand. This could include evacuation procedures or arranging transportation, but is dependent upon the situation.

4. SRISA's Safety Team will be in contact with local authorities and/or the U.S. Consulate in Florence/U.S. Embassy in Rome, to stay informed of the situation and to make decisions.
5. Once the situation normalizes, SRISA offers support for students who may need to talk about the situation. A licensed therapist is available to speak with students.

### **INDIVIDUAL STUDENT EMERGENCY**

In the event of an emergency affecting an individual, appropriate help will be summoned, i.e.: hospital, medical personnel, police, fire dept., etc. Our staff members keep all local emergency phone numbers stored in their cell phones and at their office. Emergency phone numbers are given to students upon arrival and during Orientation, and are posted around the school. Safety Team members to contact in the event of a personal emergency are Director Rebecca Olsen and Associate Director Alexandra Rojas.

The emergency contact person indicated on the student's application form would be contacted in the event of an individual emergency.

### **CONTACTING STAFF/STUDENTS IN AN EMERGENCY**

As Ms. Olsen and Ms. Rojas would be in constant contact with each other and with students in the event of an emergency, it would be necessary for us to keep their phone lines available. Therefore, the protocol for obtaining information on a student during an emergency is as follows:

- Parents or others wishing to contact SRISA should contact Ms. Busch
- Email [info@srisa.org](mailto:info@srisa.org) with your concern, student's name, and your contact information, to receive a response or return phone call

### **PERSONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The following information addresses issues such as general health and safety precautions, security, and local crime.



## **Personal Health**

It is important that students maintain their health and wellness while abroad. If you do become sick and need to see a doctor or pharmacist, SRISA staff will assist you in finding a clinic, hospital, or local pharmacy. All students with diagnosed medical conditions are encouraged to stipulate this on their enrollment application and to inform SRISA staff upon arriving at the campus in Florence so that we can be prepared in case of an emergency. It is recommended that students bring a sufficient supply of their prescription and over the counter medications and to continue to take them as prescribed while studying abroad.

## **Crime**

Florence as a whole is a relatively safe city. Students should follow the same safety precautions that they would anywhere else and not take risks that they would not take at home. There is very little violent crime in Florence and most criminal activity is in the form of petty theft. Students can find crime safety tips on our website, in the Pre-Departure Handbook, and Orientation information.

In the event of an emergency affecting an individual, appropriate help will be summoned. Safety Team members to contact in the event of a personal emergency are Director Rebecca Olsen and Associate Director Alexandra Rojas. The emergency contact person indicated on the student's application form would be contacted in the event of an individual emergency.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

NOTE: 011 is the prefix to dial internationally from the U.S. to Italy. 39 is the country code for Italy, dial only when outside of Italy. 055 is the city code for Florence land lines.

Cellular phone numbers do not have 055 before the number. Most numbers start with 377... 329... etc. You will also notice that the length of phone numbers vary in Italy. Numbers will be as few as 4 and as many as 7 numbers after the city or cell code.

### **SRISA EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER**

SRISA Emergency (General)	335 764 2583
SRISA Emergency (Housing)	335 775 9431

Dialing from the United States: add 011-39 before the number

## **CAMPUSES**

Liberal Arts and Administration: Piazza Indipendenza 4, 50129 FLORENCE  
ITALY

PHONE: 39-055-4627374

Fine Arts Campus: Via San Gallo 53-red, 50129 FLORENCE ITALY

## **U.S. ADMISSIONS OFFICE**

SANTA REPARATA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ART

921 South St. Mary's Street, San Antonio, TX 78205-3452

PHONE: 210-340-2675

## **EMAIL CONTACTS**

- Rebecca Olsen, Director, [rolsen@santareparata.org](mailto:rolsen@santareparata.org)
- Alexandra Rojas, Associate Director, [arojas@santareparata.org](mailto:arojas@santareparata.org)
- Laelle Busch, Registrar, [registrar@santareparata.org](mailto:registrar@santareparata.org)
- General Inquiry, [info@santareparata.org](mailto:info@santareparata.org)

## **Other Important Numbers**

- Taxi: 055-4242 / 055-4390
- Police Department: 113
- Fire Department: 115
- Ambulance: 118
- America Consulate, Florence: 055-266951
- U.S Embassy in Rome: 06-57300682
- National Emergencies, Tel. (0039) 06 46741
- [www.usembassy.it](http://www.usembassy.it) / [www.usis.it](http://www.usis.it)





## USEFUL WEBSITES

- SRISA Website  
[www.santareparata.org](http://www.santareparata.org)
- U.S. Embassy in Rome  
[www.usembassy.it](http://www.usembassy.it)
- Official city of Florence webpage  
[en.comune.fi.it](http://en.comune.fi.it)
- English language bi-monthly newsletter  
[www.theflorentine.net](http://www.theflorentine.net)
- Italian newspaper  
[www.corriere.it/english](http://www.corriere.it/english)
- Local guide to studying in Florence  
[www.studentsville.it](http://www.studentsville.it)
- Cinema schedules, Italian lessons, city event schedule  
[www.firenzenet.com](http://www.firenzenet.com)
- Event Information  
[www.comunedifirenze.com](http://www.comunedifirenze.com)
- Opera, Ballet, Concert Information  
[www.maggiofiorentino.com](http://www.maggiofiorentino.com)
- Official Information for Traveling in Tuscany.  
[www.firenze.turismo.toscana.it](http://www.firenze.turismo.toscana.it)
- Student travel agency  
[www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com)  
[www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)

- Florence bus information  
[www.ataf.net](http://www.ataf.net)
- The Universal Currency Converter  
[www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)
- Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C.  
[www.italyemb.org](http://www.italyemb.org)
- Information on US passports and visas  
[www.traveldocs.com](http://www.traveldocs.com)
- Online flight agencies  
[www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)  
[www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)  
[www.skyscanner.it](http://www.skyscanner.it)  
[www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com)
- Regional and national train information  
[www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it)
- Regional and national train information  
[www.italotreno.it](http://www.italotreno.it)

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Ambulance	118
Police	113
Fire	115

Tourist Medical Service (24 hours)	055 475 411
American Consulate (Emergencies)	055 239 8276
Taxi	055 4242 / 055 4390 / 055 4798

SRISA (Piazza Indipendenza 4)	055 462 7374
SRISA (Via San Gallo 53/Red)	055 500 0380
SRISA Emergency (General)	335 764 2583
SRISA Emergency (Housing)	335 775 9431

## HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS

AT&T (USA direct)	800 172 444
MCI (Worldphone)	800 905 825
Sprint	800 172 405
US State Dep't-Overseas Citizen Services	001 202 647 5225
US State Dep't Travel Website: <a href="http://www.state.gov/travel">www.state.gov/travel</a>	

## US EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

Consulate in Florence, Lungarno Vespucci 38	055 266 951
Embassy in Rome, Via Vittorio Veneto	121 06 46741
Consulate in Milan, Via Principe Amedeo 2/10	02 290 351
Consulate in Naples, Piazza della Repubblica	081 583 8111
Website: <a href="http://www.usembassy.it">www.usembassy.it</a>	

