



Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

Travel guidelines

The AFS travel guidelines apply to all AFS students regardless of their age.

General guidelines regarding travelling

The exchange student is allowed to travel independently maximum two times during the exchange period and can be absent from school maximum of ten days due to travelling. "Abi" and "vanhojen" cruises are included to these two independent trips.

The exchange student **ALWAYS** needs independent travel permission for "Abi" and "vanhojen" cruises. The travel permission needs to be applied from the AFS office with the travel permission application.

It is always AFS Finland (the AFS office in Helsinki) who grants all the travel permissions. The volunteers in the local AFS chapter or the natural parents of the student or the AFS office in the home country do not grant travel permissions.

The exchange student is always responsible for all the travel arrangements for example possible VISAs and permissions from the Airlines or cruise companies. AFS office doesn't have the time to organize or help with any travel arrangements.

The travel permission applications have to be sent to AFS office well in advance but at latest 3 weeks prior the planned trip. The student should not book flights or make other payments before he/she has the travel permission from AFS Finland. If the student books flights before applying the permission and AFS denies the application the student is responsible for the lost money. Travelling without required permission from AFS is strictly prohibited and student travelling without permission will be sent home.

The deadline for the travel permission applications is the 30th of April (the application has to be at the AFS office the latest 30th of April) for all the independent trips or other trips that require permission from AFS Finland that will take place in May or June. After that date AFS office will no longer handle any travel permission applications. This doesn't apply trips with the host family.

All the trips should take place during school holidays or weekends. AFS doesn't grant permissions for travelling during exam periods. If the trip takes place during the school week the student must always ask permission to be absent from the headmaster or contact teacher of the host school. The student can be absent from school maximum 5 school days per trip.

It is recommended that year program students will only travel independently during the spring semester.

Trips that AFS Finland will not authorize

Cruises to Stockholm and Tallinn alone, with same age friends or with other exchange students are prohibited. This applies also the day cruises to Tallinn which are prohibited when travelling alone or with other exchange students or Finnish same age friends! On the cruise or day trip there always need to be host parents or an adult chaperon who is notable older than the students and approved by AFS office.

InterRail is prohibited in Finland and abroad.

Sleeping over or camping at any music festivals (Provinssirock, Tuska etc.) or any similar event is strictly prohibited! Visiting music festivals during day time is allowed with the permission of the host family.

The exchange students are not allowed to travel alone or with other exchange students for example to Lapland or rent cabins or other places, stay in hostels, holiday houses, motels, hotels or travel as a "tourists" to another city in Finland unless they are travelling with the host family or other chaperon approved by AFS.

The exchange students are not allowed to participate alone or with other exchange students in tourist trips abroad organized by travel agencies. Furthermore, exchange students are not allowed to travel abroad as a group of students and stay in hotels, hostels, cabins or motels.

Travelling with the host family

In Finland

In Finland the AFS student is allowed to travel with his/her host family without a specific permission from the AFS office. However, during school weeks travelling is not allowed as the school is priority for all the AFS students.

Abroad

AFS student is allowed to travel with his/her host family abroad without a specific permission from the AFS office. If the host family is planning a longer trip (more than few days) with the student, AFS office has to be notified about the destination and the duration of the trip. If the trip is during school week (which is not preferable) the student needs also permission from his/her host school.

Travelling independently

If the student wants to plan a trip alone, the student must always first ask permission from the host family. The host family has the right to say no to the plans.

In Finland

The student can visit the relatives and friends of the host family, visit other AFS exchange students or visit the friends from school without a specific permission from the AFS office as long as the host family and the welcoming family agrees on the visit. Unnecessary absences from school must be avoided. If the student is planning for example a skiing trip with friends from school, permission from the AFS office is needed.

Student please note: If you are planning to sleep over at other AFS family, your host parents and the parents of that family need to agree with sleepover first. You just can not makes plans in Facebook or WhatsApp with other exchange students. Always speak first with your host family.

Abroad

An exchange year is not about travelling, therefore the student needs a very good reason to travel independently abroad for example to visit a close relative who lives in another country in Europe or to visit former AFS host sibling.

If an exchange student is planning to travel independently abroad he/she must **ALWAYS** ask for permission from the AFS office. The *travel permission application* must be filled in carefully and sent to the AFS office (semester students: susanna.taskinen@afs.org or year students: suvi.turunen@afs.org). The AFS office will handle each travel application individually. If all the required information is included on the travel permission application and AFS office thinks the trip meets AFS safety guidelines the travel permission can be granted. Otherwise AFS will deny the permission. The *travel permission application* has to be sent to AFS office at least 3 weeks prior the planned trip.

If AFS Finland allows student to travel independently abroad, AFS Finland will ask for the AFS office in student's home country to deliver a specific *Travel Waiver* signed by student's natural parents or legal guardians. The *Travel Waiver* is a specific permission for the one trip the student has applied the travel permission for. The *Travel Waiver* is always handled by the AFS office and AFS Finland will ask for the *Travel Waiver* from the AFS office of the student's home country only if AFS Finland has approved of student's travel permission application. By signing the *Travel Waiver* the natural parents or legal guardians of the student release AFS and the host family from all responsibility during the independent trip abroad, however the AFS Insurance is valid also during the independent trip abroad.

During the AFS program the student can be granted maximum of two permissions for independent trips abroad.

The spring semester is always a very busy season at the AFS office and therefore the deadline for all travel permission applications is the 30th of April. After this date the AFS office will not handle any more travel permission applications. So plan your independent trips well beforehand to avoid the disappointments.

When the exchange student plans an independent trip abroad:

The student needs a permission from the host family

The student **needs an invitation** from the family or the person whom the student is planning to visit. The person/family whom the student is planning to visit must be someone that the student knows very well beforehand.

The invitation can be an informal letter or email, that includes the contact information of the family/person whom the student is planning to visit. The invitation has to be attached to travel permission application. When travelling alone, the student is not allowed to stay in hotels or hostels or with strangers.

If the trip is during school week (which is not preferable) the student needs a written permission from the hosting school. The student can be absent from the school maximum of 5 school days. The permission has to be attached to travel permission application

The student needs to fill out carefully the *travel permission application* form (can be found from the AFS website www.afs.fi/isantaperheeksi/materiaali) and return it to the AFS office (semester students: susanna.taskinen@afs.org or year students: suvi.turunen@afs.org).

Travelling with host school

In Finland

The exchange student can participate in school trips in Finland with the permission of the host family.

Abroad

If the student is planning on participating in a school trip abroad the same travel guidelines apply as travelling independently abroad. The student has to apply travel permission from the AFS office with a travel permission application form. The trip schedule and the contact information of the supervising teachers or chaperons have to be attached to the application.

Participating on “abi” and “vanhojen” cruises to Stockholm or Tallinn is allowed as long as all the required permissions are taken care of with the AFS office and the student has permission from the host family.

Please note:

All the AFS students must return home after the AFS program ends.

Semester students can not extend their Semester Program to a Year Program.