

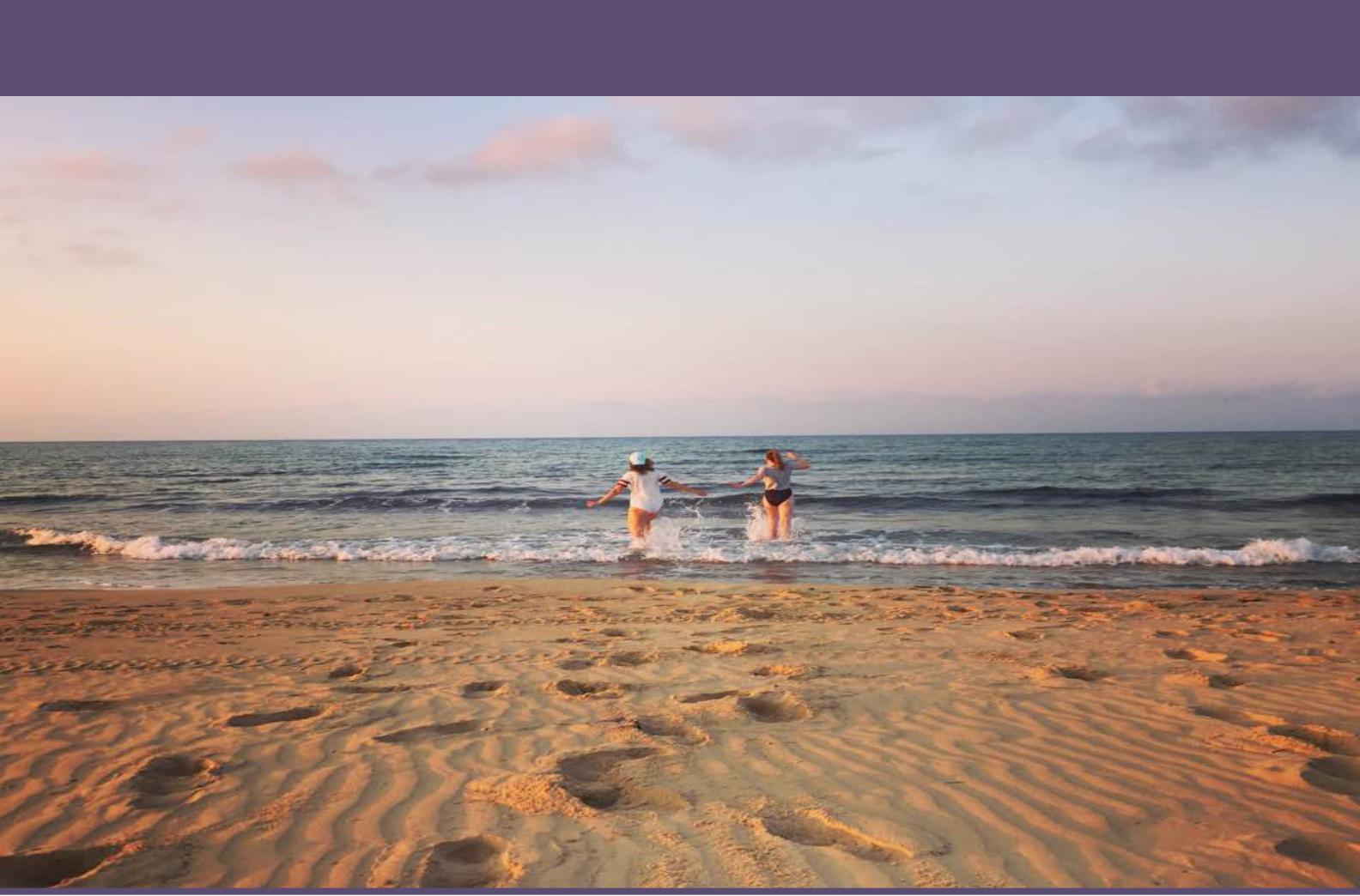
# Participant Handbook

## Tunis, Tunisia



أميدسٌت

amideast education abroad in the meno



### EMERGENCY LINE: 1-202-599-3055

Please note that this number is for your family and friends to use in case of an emergency and will connect them to our headquarters in **DC 24 hours a day**. Emergencies in Tunisia should be reported to the **emergency line in Tunisia**, which will be programmed in your Tunisian cell phones.

We strongly recommend that all participants share a copy of this handbook and review the information with those they have listed as emergency contacts in the [Student Portal](#).

Amideast Center Street Address  
33 Rue Ahmed Rami, Cite Jardins, Tunis-Belvedere  
1002 Tunis, Tunisia  
Tel: +216-71-145-730  
Fax: +216-71-145-760

Amideast Center Hours: Monday–Friday, 8:00 am–4:30 pm

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[www.amideast.org/abroad](http://www.amideast.org/abroad) | EdAbroad@amideast.org

Ahlan wa sahan! **Congratulations on your admission to an Amideast program in Tunis!** We look forward to welcoming you to Tunisia. This handbook contains a great deal of useful information to help prepare you to have a successful experience in Tunisia. **Please read it cover to cover** so you have clear expectations of this experience. You will be grateful you did!

أهلاً و سهلاً!

Please note that the information contained in this Student Handbook was correct when it was written. **Amideast reserves the right change any of the policies and procedures contained herein without notice.**

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# Section I: Pre-departure & Arrival

## Program Management

America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (Amideast) is a private, nonprofit organization that strengthens mutual understanding and cooperation between Americans and the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa. Every year, Amideast provides English language and professional skills training, educational advising, and testing services to hundreds of thousands of students and professionals in the Middle East and North Africa; supports numerous institutional development projects in the region; and administers educational exchange programs. Founded in 1951, Amideast is headquartered in Washington, DC, with a network of field offices in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank/Gaza, and Yemen.

Amideast's Education Abroad department designs academic study, cultural immersion, and professional development programs that capitalize on the diverse resources of and experiences available in each country where Amideast operates in the region. Using its extensive network of field offices and contacts throughout the region, Amideast is able to customize programs to meet the specific needs and interests of each client. Its programs accommodate groups of any size and range in duration from a few days to an entire academic year.

### Program Calendars

All program calendars are available on the Amideast Student Portal under the Program Calendar tab.

### Action Amideast: Social Innovation Abroad

## Preparing for Departure

◊ **Call your credit card company and bank.**

- Inform them of the dates you will be travelling and the countries you will be visiting so your cards are not blocked when used internationally.
- Find out about fees for ATM usage and international purchases.

◊ **Visit your dentist.**

- Your program insurance ([CISI Insurance](#)) does not cover routine dental care.

◊ **Visit your doctor.**

- Discuss any chronic physical or mental health issues that may need attention while you are abroad.
- Ensure you have prescription medicines to last for your entire time abroad.
- Request a generic prescription and letter of explanation to bring along with all medications.

◊ **Discuss your health insurance with your family and set up your account in the [CISI Portal](#).**

◊ **Research your host country and city to learn as much as possible before you depart.**



## Get and Stay Connected

During your pre-departure process remember that there are several ways to connect online with Amideast students, alumni, and staff.

◊ If you haven't already, feel free to [visit our collaborative student blog](#) to read about experiences from previous and current students studying abroad with Amideast.

◊ **Visit and like our social media accounts.** You can find them all linked on the first page of this handbook!

◊ **Regularly participate in the pre-departure online discussions and activities** hosted by Amideast Online (an Online Learning Management Platform). More information on how to access this platform will be available in the Student Portal.

## Flight Information

In addition to the information included here, please refer to the [Student Portal](#) for more information regarding arrival in Tunisia.

- ◊ **Arrival Time:** All students are required to arrive in Tunisia on the day indicated “Students Arrive” on the program calendar.
- ◊ **Flight Information:** Please upload your flight itinerary and fill out the “Flight Information: Arrival” and “Flight Information: Departure” in your Student Portal.
- ◊ **Arrival Transportation:** Amideast will provide transportation from the **Tunis-Carthage International Airport (TUN)** to your accommodations if you arrive during the designated time frame. While Amideast can help make arrangements for transport from other airports, these will be out-of-pocket expenses. If you do not complete the “Flight Information: Arrival” questionnaire in your Student Portal **one month before your arrival**, we will not be able to pick you up from the airport.
- ◊ **Early Arrival:** If you arrive before the arrival date, you are responsible for your own transportation from the airport as well as accommodation up to the start of the program. If you are arriving early, please answer accordingly in the Student Portal and provide information as to where you will be staying prior to program.
- ◊ **Late Arrival:** Students **are not** allowed to arrive after the indicated arrival date as **orientation is mandatory**. Please note that if you purchase a ticket arriving after the designated arrival date you will be asked to change the ticket to an earlier date.
- ◊ **Departure:** You should plan to depart Tunis on **the day following the final day of your program** as detailed above.
- ◊ **Departure Transportation:** Amideast will provide you with transportation to the airport at the end of the program if you depart on the date indicated as “Students Depart” on the academic calendar. If you choose to stay on beyond the end of the program, you are responsible for your own transportation to the airport. If you do not complete the “Flight Information: Departure” questionnaire in your Student Portal **three weeks before your departure**, we will not be able to take you to the airport.
- ◊ **Independent Travel:** If you plan to travel before the program starts or after it ends, please be sure to keep us informed so we know whether you need help arranging transport, although the costs will be out-of-pocket.



## Arrival Information

Please anticipate waiting longer than you may be accustomed to when exiting the airport. Clearing passport control and customs will be your introduction to the cultural differences you will encounter while living in Tunisia.

Arriving students can meet the Amideast representative **after they exit the baggage area**. Once past customs but still within the airport, look for someone who will be holding a sign with the Amideast logo. **The representative will wait at the airport and will not leave without you, even if your flight is delayed.** The representative will be waiting, so do not worry about being left at the airport.

If there are any problems upon arrival at the airport, call the

### **Amideast Tunisia Emergency number at**

**(+216) 53-009-400**

You can reach this number through WhatsApp using the airport WiFi, but if you do not have a phone on you, do not worry. If you are having trouble, ask any security guard or airport official for help.

Students are encouraged to obtain Tunisian currency at the airport prior to meeting an Amideast representative. There are banks, foreign exchange offices, and ATMs that are open throughout Tunisian airports. **We advise you to obtain Tunisian money to use during the weekend over orientation.** Many banks and foreign exchange offices outside of the airport in Tunisia are not open over the weekend. Amideast representatives meeting students at the airport have instructions to wait for you until you obtain money.

**If your baggage does not arrive on the flight with you, submit your claim to the airline's airport baggage services before you leave the luggage area.** To file a claim, you will need your luggage claim tags that were given to you at check-in as well as a description of what your bags look like. Please make sure to keep this with you in your carry-on luggage.

**If your flight is delayed for more than an hour, if you missed a connection and have been re-routed by the airline, or if your flight is canceled, you must contact Amideast immediately at**

**1-202-599-3055 (if you are in the US) or at**

**+216-53-009-400 (dialing internationally) or 53-009-400 (dialing locally)**

## Visa Information

Please visit your [Student Portal](#) to find the most up-to-date information about obtaining a Tunisian visa.

Non-US citizens should get a head start in contacting Tunisia's embassy or consulate in their home countries, as visa and residency requirements may require fees and significant time to process.

## US Department of State Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

All students who are US citizens should enroll in the US Department of State Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, prior to leaving for Tunisia. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a **free service** provided by the US Government to US citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country.

STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency. STEP also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest US embassy or consulate.

Once you enroll in STEP you can also subscribe to receive updates on Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and other information for Tunisia. Please visit [their website](#) to register.



## Orientation

Amideast assumes each student's home institution will provide an orientation covering relevant academic matters prior to departure. It is the sole responsibility of the student to be familiar with their home institution's relevant policies and information.

There will be a series of activities and webinars in the **pre-departure phase**, hosted by Amideast Online to help you prepare for the program.

Then, the Amideast Education Abroad Program **on-site orientation** takes place once program participants have arrived in their host country. **Orientation is an integral component of the program, and all students are required to attend all events and activities.**

During this orientation a variety of discussions and activities are designed to introduce Amideast Education Abroad Program students to Tunisian culture and daily life and familiarize them with the logistics of the program.

## Packing List

It can be stressful to think about all the things you may need to bring with you for your time abroad, whether it is a semester or a month. Please see our packing list suggestions to help you narrow what you need to bring. But we'll start with some helpful, general tips.

- ◊ Please make sure your **luggage is sturdy** and can withstand being thrown around.
- ◊ **Don't check anything you're not willing to lose;** this includes cash, cameras, passports, jewelry, irreplaceable items, and breakables.
- ◊ Pack all **liquid containers in sealable plastic bags** in case they leak.
- ◊ Pack a **carry-on with essential items** that could get you through the first 48 hours in the event that your checked luggage is delayed or lost. If the airline demands that you check a carry-on at the gate, take the time to remove all valuables.
- ◊ **If you do lose your baggage,** keep in mind that most airlines require reports to be filed within 21 days of the date the luggage was lost. If you miss the deadline to complete a baggage report, the airline can deny your claim.
- ◊ Include a copy of your name and personal information, along with the Amideast's contact information, **inside your luggage**, as exterior baggage tags can become separated from luggage.
- ◊ Prior to departure, determine **your airline's specific luggage weight and carry on limitations**, including quantity of liquids and size of containers you will be allowed to bring on the plane.
- ◊ Your smartphone may not work in Tunisia **unless it is unlocked**, which may require you to pay off the full cost of the phone. If you wish to use your current phone line, you must arrange for **roaming cell services** through your provider. If you do have roaming on your phone, be aware that this can be very expensive. We recommend that you use the local cell phone Amideast provides and **connect your smartphone to WiFi**.
- ◊ **Less is more!** You will likely want to bring things back from your host country. Most students indicate that they brought too much with them. You will have a chance to donate gently used clothing and other items at the end of the program.



## What to Wear in Tunisia

Clothing in Tunisia can be **more conservative** than that to which you may be accustomed. While you may see people wearing short dresses, tank tops, and shorts, it is not recommended. While unfair, what you wear can send messages to those around you or make your Tunisian friends and host family uncomfortable. Visitors from abroad can draw added attention if they wear what might be considered inappropriate clothing.

Here are some tips on what to bring with you, specifically some clothing suggestions:

- ◊ **In General:** Jeans, khakis, trousers, or a long (below the knee) skirt, with cotton shirts, a sweater or sweatshirt, and comfortable walking shoes would be a good daily uniform. For worksite placements, having business casual options is a good idea. A light jacket would be useful for cooler nights. Tank tops and shorts are worn frequently in the US, but they may draw unwanted attention and are not appropriate for all scenarios.
- ◊ **Nice and Well-worn Options:** Bring a relatively formal (but conservative) outfit, as you may be invited out with your host family or Tunisian friends to a dinner or a wedding. Keep in mind that many Tunisians value dressing well, so clothing that you can wear out and that is also appropriate will be useful. Also bring a set of clothes you don't mind getting dirty in case you participate in community service projects.
- ◊ **Beach Wear:** Most people wear regular clothes to the beach if their accommodations are not directly on the beach. There are usually no changing facilities on the beach, however, so it's easiest to wear your bathing suit underneath your clothes. On the beach, many people wear a wrap or shawl to cover up a bit - either to be modest or to protect themselves from the sun (or both). A light wrap would be good to bring in case the sun becomes too strong.
- ◊ **Be Comfortable:** A hat is useful to keep the very strong sun off your head and to keep you cool. If your everyday walking shoes are not sturdy enough for more rugged terrain, please bring a pair of athletic shoes or hiking boots. Casual jewelry is fine but keep your bling to a minimum. As with any valuables, bring only what jewelry you think you'll need or that you want to have with you for sentimental purposes.
- ◊ **Culturally Appropriate Dress:**
  - Adult men and women sometimes wear shorts out and about in Tunisia, and they're fine at a pool or beach. You should not plan on wearing them in your homestay as it can be inappropriate to wear shorts in front of your host family and their guests. You may wear them in a gym, but should wear long trousers while in transit.
  - There is no need for foreign women to wear a hijab/veil (scarf on the head), but hair should be covered if visiting a mosque.

"If I were to give advice of any kind:  
BRING OR GET A SCARF!! If you wrap  
it around your head or your neck it  
protects you from the sun and gives  
you a bit of help where you might  
not know you need it."

- Laurie Jones, Amideast alumna

- Keep in mind that if you will be living with a host family, how you dress and behave is a reflection not only on yourself, but also on members of your host family. No matter where you live, how you dress and behave is a reflection on all the members of the Amideast community.

*Check out these suggestions from former students and our bloggers as to what to pack for your time abroad!*



**"If you're packing light, basics are always a good way to go."**

- Laurie Jones, Amideast alumna

- Tunisians dress quite formally and fashionable, so most of the time, especially outside your home, you will want to maintain a neat appearance. For many worksite placements, business casual attire is appropriate.
- You will be commuting from your place of residence to Amideast using mostly Bolt (a rideshare app similar to Uber), taxis, and maybe various forms of public transportation and you will want to maintain dress and decorum in a way that best helps mitigate any discomfort you might experience moving through space as a foreign visitor.

### **Carry-on Baggage Packing List**

- Passport (leave a copy of your passport with a parent or other trusted person)
- Contact information for Amideast, including emergency numbers
- Contact information for study abroad office or campus safety at home institution
- Debit and/or credit cards
- Phone numbers in case of lost or stolen credit and/or debit cards
- Computer and/or other electronics such as a camera
- Emergency cash
- Prescription medications for the first two weeks
- All valuable items you are bringing along
- Something to read/entertainment for the long flight!
- Extra change of clothes and a few changes of undergarments in case of lost luggage

### **Luggage Packing List**

#### **Medication & Toiletries**

- Prescription medications for entire stay with a copy of the written medical prescription and generic drug name. Make sure these are in their original containers. Also ensure that you check with CISI Insurance and your doctor to ensure that the medications you are bringing are **legal** in Tunisia. **Do not mail** yourself medications as these will likely get held up in customs, and you will have to pay a lot of money to get them out of customs if you're allowed to take them at all. If you have any concerns about medications while you are abroad, please contact [EdAbroad@amideast.org](mailto:EdAbroad@amideast.org) as soon as possible.
- Multi-vitamins or supplements
- Oral rehydration salts and anti-diarrheal medicine
- Sunscreen

- Travel-sized toiletries for your first few days until you have a chance to go to a supermarket. While many toiletries you might need are available in Tunisia, if you have a favorite brand of toiletry that you need or that makes you especially happy and comfortable, bring enough for your entire stay in case that particular thing is unavailable or very expensive. **We also recommend that participants who rely on tampons bring a summer's supply with them** because brands are limited in Tunisia.
- Eyeglasses/contact lenses (with lens solution)

## Clothing

- Several cotton shirts, both short- and long-sleeved
- Pants or long skirts (mid-thigh length or longer)
- 1-3 nice/business casual outfits for special occasions or worksite
- Underwear, bras, and socks
- Pajamas (keeping in mind you also want these to be culturally appropriate)
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Light jacket
- Hat for sun protection
- Sunglasses
- Cotton bandana or scarf
- Bathing suit and cover up

## Books & Electronics

- Small sturdy backpack or duffle/carryall bag
- Plug adapter(s) (see "Electricity" section below)
- Pens/pencils and notebooks (will be available on site as well, but will be different than those you are accustomed to)
- Camera, memory cards and batteries
- Travel alarm clock
- Any required textbooks (see the Amideast Student Portal for more information)
- Guidebook

"When it comes to packing, clothing is arguably the most difficult aspect. It is very easy to overpack, under-pack, or simply pack items that are not useful or appropriate.

**A common rule of thumb for packing light is you should pack the same for six months as you do for two weeks because you can do laundry.**

Additionally, many students buy clothes, especially t-shirts (often with Arabic on them!) where they are studying abroad so they do not need to bring a ton with them."

- Ciara Tenney, Amideast alumna

## Other Suggestions from Past Students

- A laptop
- Small souvenirs or gifts for your new Tunisian friends
- Zip-lock bags
- Wet wipes
- Earplugs (if you're a light sleeper)
- Money pouch
- Durable, high-quality water bottle
- Hairdryer if needed (dual voltage with an adapter plug)
- Favorite recipes
- Pictures of your family, friends, and college life (remember to choose ones which will be considered culturally appropriate)
- Journal and/or address book
- Slippers or flip flops for wearing around your accommodations (most Tunisians don't walk around the house in bare feet)
- Travel flashlight or headlamp
- Note cards
- Hair extensions (if you use them; they are hard to find and very expensive in Tunisia. If you think you'll need them, it's best to bring your own. It can also be extremely difficult to find hairdressers who know how to put them in, but staff will do their best to help.)
- Waterproof clothing (umbrella/rain boots) and windbreaker
- Small first aid kit
- Towel (this is available in Tunisia; however, the quality of towels can be unsatisfactory to some students)
- Some students do bring their smart phones and turn off the data function so they can connect to WiFi. Some students have also replaced their SIM card in their current phone with the card provided by Amideast.
- Portable battery pack to charge your phone on the go
- Avoid clothes needing special care.** Dry cleaning is available and reasonably priced for most items, but it is much easier to deal with clothing that can be hand or machine washed. Your host mother may prefer to do your laundry; in this case, make sure not to give her things that need special care and hand wash those items yourself.



## Section II: Academics & Academic Policies

### Amideast Tunisia Study Environment

All classes are held in Amideast's center in Tunisia. The center is located in the Cite Jardins area of Tunis-Belvedere, where there are many cafes and some restaurants within walking distance. It is also located approximately ten minutes by taxi from other popular neighborhoods such as Avenue Habib Bourguiba, Manar, Menzah, Nassar, and Les Berges du Lac. While the Amideast center in Tunis is not located on or near a university campus, there are many Tunisians who use this center for many educational and training activities, meaning the center does not house only education abroad programs.

The Amideast center is a large facility in a stand-alone building with a number modern classrooms, WiFi access, a lounge space for teachers, staff offices, and a cozy thriving library of books inside the "American Corner" that Education Abroad students are more than welcome to use. The American Corner also has some laptops reserved for student use. Although computers are available, Amideast recommends that students bring a laptop if possible. Not only will you need to complete homework outside of the Amideast center, but you're going to want to use it for research, to stay in touch with folks at home, for entertainment, and so forth.



### Courses with Amideast

For a detailed list of courses, required textbooks, chapters covered, please see "Course Textbooks" in your [Student Portal](#). Please ensure that **you bring a copy of any textbooks indicated with you**, as books are notably more expensive or unavailable in Tunisia.

For a sample of the course syllabi, please visit [amideastedabroad.org/syllabi](http://amideastedabroad.org/syllabi).

## Who Will Be Teaching?

Amideast Education Abroad Program courses in Tunisia are taught by a select group of professors from a variety of institutions in and around Tunisia. Like faculty on your home campus, they are a diverse group and may include both Tunisian and non-Tunisian experts in their fields. **All have both fluency in English and strong instructional experience in English-speaking environments.** All faculty members have either earned post-graduate degrees from North American or European universities, or have spent extended periods at English-medium institutions as students, faculty members, visiting faculty, or visiting researchers.

All courses are taught exclusively for the Amideast program, and students take classes only with other program participants.

## Amideast Online

Amideast Education Abroad makes extensive use of a Moodle-based LMS (Learning Management System), similar to what you use at your own university. Starting in the pre-departure process and throughout your time abroad, staff and faculty will make extensive use of the LMS for communication, assignments, and resources. **Instructions and account information will be distributed via email through the Student Portal per the schedule made available to you in the portal** so that you can complete a number of pre-departure requirements and activities.

## Academic Culture

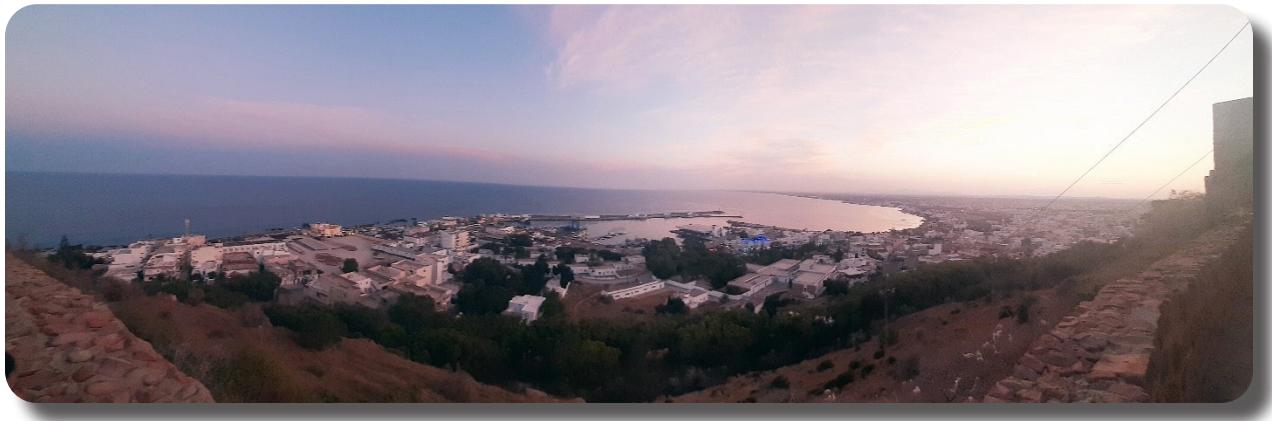
This is a serious academic program and as a result you should not expect it to be any easier than a term on your home campus — in fact, you may find it more challenging. Courses assume that you will do a significant amount of work, at minimum 3–4 hours per day, outside of formal classroom settings. Students consistently comment that this program is more rigorous than they were expecting, so expect a challenge!

While you should maintain the same standards for this academic program that you do for the courses at your home institution, the teaching styles, conditions, and approaches that you will encounter will inevitably be different than those to which you are accustomed. It is important that you do not undervalue the quality of the academic experience in your courses simply because they are not identical to those at your home institution. You should not let these differences negatively affect the rigor with which you approach your courses. In fact, the process of adjustment that you must make to accommodate these differences demands greater rigor, and this process will be a valuable part of your academic experience.





At Amideast, we craft our programs so that each component – from living situations, to courses, to excursions, to activities – is intimately tied into your overall academic experience. There is no component of our programs that is tangential or an “amenity.” The idea is that to fully benefit from your time abroad you must treat each of these components as a rigorous experience for learning and personal development.



## Program Excursions

Excursions are an integral part of the academic experience and are included in the program fee. Organized activities are combined with free time to allow students to explore independently. Past excursions have included the breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage sites of Carthage and the Roman Amphitheater of El Jem. Other excursions have included visits to Sidi Bou Said, **Kelibia** (pictured above), Tozeur, and the salt lake of Chott El-Djerid. Students may also enjoy an overnight excursion to Tatooine or a sunset camel ride in the Sahara Desert of Douz. Details about the excursions will be provided by program staff in Tunis during and after orientation. These excursions will provide you with a valuable, first-hand experience in different areas of Tunisia to supplement what you learn from your courses and your experiences in Tunis. While excursions are designed to be fun, their ultimate aim is to improve your understanding of Tunisian culture and society.

## Note About Early Departure

As stated in the Student Agreement and Release, students must complete the program and remain at the program site until the end-date specified in the program's Academic Calendar. **Reflection Period and finals are considered part of the academic program and are mandatory.** Early departures are not permitted, except under extraordinary circumstances and requested long in advance.

## Library Resources

Amideast maintains a **nice, growing library** and a student lounge for students in the program. Library resources are available to students in the American Corner. The American Corner offers a wide variety of free events for Tunisian students, professionals, and others interested in the US, American culture, entrepreneurship, English language, and more.

By using the wireless Internet available at Amideast, students also may access the electronic holdings of their home institutions' libraries for research.



## Language Proficiency and Community-Based Learning Placement

Amideast Education Abroad programs **finalize their Community-Based Learning (CBL) placements onsite**. The placement process requires students to submit a number of materials and confirm their language proficiency (if applicable).

**All participants in Amideast programs are required to submit the required materials to facilitate their Community-Based Learning Placement. Full descriptions of what is required can be found in the pre-departure materials in Amideast Online (access granted via your Student Portal) and this is also where you will submit these items. You will not receive your official placement until you arrive onsite in Tunisia.**

Keep in mind that it is possible that a placement in your desired field/organization may not be available, but staff will do their best to make sure you are comfortable with your worksite. If there are any issues with your placement, let your CBL professor and/or Amideast staff know as soon as possible.

Written/oral Arabic placement exams are not required for the Tunisian Colloquial Arabic course. However, proficiency in Arabic, French, or American Sign Language may be examined as it bears upon CBL placements.

## Academic Policies

For detailed information about policies regarding Grade Reports/Transcripts, Course Loads, Drop/Add Period, Withdrawal from a Course, Pass/Fail/Audit Options, and Appeals, **please carefully review the Student Agreement and Release**. These policies are spelled out in detail and you will be expected to be familiar with them upon your arrival in Tunisia.

# Section III: Onsite in Tunis

## Program Staff

While you are in Tunis, your program will be coordinated by several Amideast staff members who work specifically on Education Abroad Programs. This staff coordinates all aspects of the Tunis Education Abroad Program, including orientation, housing, excursions, scheduling, student activities, and much more. Our Amideast Tunisia staff will be an invaluable resource during your adjustment to and experience of Tunis. To learn more about the in-country staff, please visit the [Amideast website](#).

## Rules and Regulations

It cannot be stressed enough that **you are a guest in Tunis**. As such, we encourage you to think about your daily actions within that framework. You are expected to adhere to the terms of the Student Agreement and Release (found in your Student Portal) at all times during your stay in Tunis. **Further, you are required to adhere to all directions given by Amideast staff while participating on the program.** Based on Amideast's vast experience in the region, these policies have been put in place to ensure your safety and well-being and serve as a reference for appropriate standards of comportment while you are in Tunisia.

"Citizen Diplomacy is the concept that the individual has the right, even the responsibility, to help shape U.S. foreign relations, 'one handshake at a time.' Citizen diplomats can be students, teachers, athletes, artists, business people, humanitarians, adventurers or tourists. They are motivated by a responsibility to engage with the rest of the world in a meaningful, mutually beneficial dialogue."

- US Center for Citizen Diplomacy

**We ask you to keep in mind that your actions represent not only yourself, but also affect the reputation of Amideast as an organization, including program staff and fellow students (present and future).** As a foreigner in Tunisia, you are always subject to the jurisdiction of Tunisian law and courts. Although the law is not always evenly applied to foreigners and nationals, law enforcement agents have in the past arrested and continue to arrest foreigners, usually related to illegal drugs and drunk driving, though not limited to these two situations.

## Co- and Extra-Curricular Activities

In addition to the academic program, the Amideast Education Abroad Program in Tunis offers a variety of co- and extra-curricular activities. These activities are designed to acquaint students with Tunisian culture and society and create space for meeting Tunisian students. **As with homestays and excursions, these are all considered integral components of the program, and are not "amenities."**

Amideast can assist in arranging and adapting volunteer projects to individual student interests to ensure a unique and educational service-learning experience.

## Policy on Independent Travel

Weekend travel, or travel on days when no classes or other program events are scheduled, is permitted, per the regulations established in the **Travel Policy** found in your [Student Portal](#).

## Host Family Accommodations

As you will be living with a host family in Tunis, you will have an opportunity to form personal relationships with Tunisians and participate in Tunisian family life. **This may require some adaptation on your part.** For example, you may be sharing a room with a host family member of the same gender, and you may not have the amount of private time, personal space, or independence that you are accustomed to having.

There will certainly be differences in economic means among families, and it would not be fair to compare families and experiences with them in this regard. **You will observe and experience many different aspects of life** in Tunisia, and you will be expected to be respectful and approach these experiences with flexibility and an open mind.

**You will learn your host family assignment upon arrival in Tunisia.** The reason we do not share your housing assignment with you earlier is because there can be a number of changes to host family assignments in the weeks leading up to your arrival, and it only creates more stress and confusion if we have to alter arrangements that we've already shared with you.

While host family accommodations vary greatly, **you should expect to have a basic bedroom that will be shared with your roommate and access to the family bathroom.** Your host family may have a desk or communal table on which you can study, but you should not expect to have a private or quiet study location in your home.

Our students often divide their study time between several locations such as the Amideast center, local cafes, and their home. As this arrangement may take some adjustment on your part, **we encourage you to think in advance about how you might modify your study habits.**

**In almost all cases, you will be placed with another student on the Amideast program.** Living with a fellow study abroad roommate allows you to bounce ideas off each other during your cultural adjustment process and travel more easily to and from your home.

For all student housing policies, please refer to the Student Agreement and Release.





Additionally, research has shown that pairing students with host families provides a more positive homestay experience. You will learn your roommate assignment upon arrival in country.

Please note that we make every effort to match students up based on similarities in their profiles. For example, matching students with similar language skills ensures that both students have an equal opportunity to build strong connections with the family.

Keep in mind that accommodations in Tunisia **often vary significantly from those that you may be accustomed to**. Homes may not have internet and hot water may not be as plentiful as you are used to. Buildings are made of stone and are designed to keep cool in the summer.

**Students should not flush any toilet paper in Tunisian toilets.** Piping systems in Tunisia are very narrow and can easily clog when toilet paper is flushed, backing up an entire building. Instead, deposit used toilet paper into a trash can beside your toilet.

Amideast staff carefully screen and select host families both for safety and so that they are representative of Tunisian society. While around 99% of Tunisians are Muslim, North Africa contains many members of religions other than Islam and Amideast does not accept or reject host family applicants based on religion. Families from any religion will help students obtain a deeper understanding of the intricate make-up of North Africa.

Tunisians speak Tunisian Arabic at home. Most host families also speak at least a little English, and especially at the beginning, will be patient with you until you are a little more confident using your Arabic. **Do not worry about making mistakes as your family will appreciate your efforts to try to use the language.** Be courageous and try speaking Arabic with them from the start!

While staying with your host family, **two meals per day will be provided for you but you may have to prepare your own breakfast or dinner.** Tunisian families may eat at least one meal a day together and sometimes more, depending on their schedule and needs. Based on your schedule, you may or may not be able to join them in family meals. Your food will, however, be available when you get home.

**Sunday lunch is usually special**, and even families who do not eat together regularly are likely to share this meal. Extended family members may also be included. Your host family understand if you cannot join meals regularly, but especially on Sundays, try your best to be there!



We want you to start thinking about issues of **flexibility** and **communication**, which will prove invaluable during your time abroad. **Families who choose to host foreign students are often taking a risk** – they are opening their home to outsiders, sharing the inner workings of their family, and oftentimes need to make large adjustments to accommodate student needs. Just as you will be attempting to adjust to life in Tunisia, so too will your host family be trying to adjust to having you in their home.

It is not uncommon for students participating on our programs in the Middle East and North Africa to have a number of different dietary religious, health, or other restrictions. **Although we cannot guarantee all specific requests, we will carefully review the Housing Profile you submit through the Student Portal to try to determine the most appropriate family for you.**

Particularly if you have very specific medical or dietary needs, we would like to encourage you to start thinking now about the sincere and often difficult adjustments that families make to help make your stay in their culture as pleasurable as possible. Once you are on program, we encourage you to reflect back on this note and remind yourself of your host family's flexibility.

## Telephone Access

Amideast will provide you with your own “pay as you go” cell phone (not a smartphone) within the first two days of arrival. **You are responsible for adding credit to this phone as needed** by purchasing a top-up card either from the mobile provider at a company store or from any supermarket that provides them. You will be able to call home with this phone, although this option is more expensive than the other options available.



This phone may be used while you are in Tunisia but you **must return it** at the end of program.

**A smartphone will work in Tunisia**, but it will need to be unlocked or set up for roaming and will cost about \$30 per month depending on your carrier. If you intend to bring a smartphone, please make arrangements with your carrier before you leave home. Turning a smartphone on “airplane mode” and **turning its WiFi connection** on can allow you to connect to internet in cafes or anywhere with a wireless connection free of charge.



## Internet Access

The Amideast center has a wireless Internet network and a few computers reserved for student use. While not required, Amideast does recommend that students bring a laptop if possible; students may also want to consider getting laptop insurance in case of damage or theft. Students who bring their own laptops can use the network during working hours (typically Monday–Saturday, 8:00 am–6:00 pm). The American Corner in Amideast also has some laptops reserved for student use. Tunis also has many cafes that provide internet with purchase, as well as internet cafes that charge about 2 dinars per hour of computer use.

Some host family homes may have internet access, but **we don't require it and families are not obligated to allow students to use it**. If your family offers, please use their internet with discretion. WiFi is expensive, generally not as fast as it is in the US, and many plans still don't include unlimited data. **Do not assume you can spend long hours online**, download large files, or stream TV shows or movies, especially when using your host family's internet connection. Many plans can run out of data or simply start accruing charges for exceeding monthly allowances. If your host family does not have internet, consider buying a portable WiFi hotspot from a local provider.

**Internet speed in Tunisia is slower and not as consistent as you are used to at home.** You should be prepared for this. Downloads can take a very long time as a result. This is normal, so you need to adjust your expectations accordingly.

## Receiving Mail in Tunisia

**We strongly discourage you from receiving letters and packages from home while in Tunisia.** The Tunisian Customs Service may hold packages until duty is paid. The Customs Service fixes an estimated value on the contents of your package (this estimate is NOT based on the value declared). Students in the past have had issues with this, and some have had to pay \$100 or more simply to collect their packages.

Sending a package through DHL or other specialized companies will not prevent this from happening. **Amideast is NOT responsible** for getting goods out of Tunisian Customs for you. In case of an emergency situation in which you feel that a package needs to be sent, please see the Program Manager in Tunis **BEFORE** the package is sent to you and make sure that your family and friends understand these difficulties.

## Climate

While summer days can be quite hot in Tunis (reaching an average of 95°F/35°C), the evenings can get quite cool. Spring and fall evenings can sometimes be as cool as 59°F/15°C. By mid to late December, the weather gets cooler, and winter can be surprisingly cold with a lot of rain in Tunis. Average winter temperatures are 50°F/10°C during the day and 39°F/4°C at night.

A light jacket or a windbreaker would also be useful in the warmer months at night, and a winter jacket and boots are strongly encouraged for programs through the months of November to March.



## Meals & Incidental Expenses

**Breakfast and dinner will be provided by your host family** during the week and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the weekends. On most days, your class schedule probably won't allow you to return home for lunch anyways, but you can either bring a lunch from home or there are many affordable options at which to eat out. Please communicate with your meal plans with your host mother on a daily basis so she can prepare accordingly.

Tunis has many fairly inexpensive restaurants with a wide variety of choices. More of these are opening up in closer proximity to Amideast (where your classes will be held), so it's becoming more convenient for you to find places to eat.



### You should also expect Bolt (a rideshare app like Uber)

**or taxi rides to be a significant incidental expense.** Since you are not living on a university campus, you will usually need to take rides from your host family to the Amideast center, to your worksite, and back each day. Bolt and taxis are much cheaper in Tunisia than in the US, but you will literally take them everywhere. Please review the "Program Costs" section of [Student Portal](#) to understand the estimated personal expenses for the program. You need to have access to funds to cover these expenses while you are abroad.

**If you decide to travel on weekends, you are responsible for all expenses.** You will need to bring money (or have access to it through the use of an ATM card) for expenses during your time abroad. Some common personal expenses include transportation, cell phone cards, internet access, personal items, and any other incidentals you wish to purchase during your time in Tunisia.

While there are many ATMs in Tunis, **PLEASE NOTE** that ATM machines are not available in smaller villages! The maximum an ATM will usually let you withdraw at one time is 800 dinars, and ATMs often run low or out of cash, so the amount available could vary. **Traveler's checks are very difficult to cash; don't bring them.**



## Electricity

Tunisia's electricity supply is 240 volts/50 cycles AC. Sockets are generally of the two-pronged European variety, mainly types C and E. **To be safe, bring a multi-country adaptor.** American equipment requires a plug adaptor, but rarely a current transformer. Adaptors can be purchased prior to departure and in Tunis.

You can **check if your electronics or other items will work in Tunis** by looking at the range of input voltages, usually found on the bottom in fine print on things like chargers. Some appliances, like hairdryers, will have a physical switch to change between voltages; make sure to flip this switch if present so you don't fry your stuff.

## Budgeting

Most American study abroad students consider living in Tunis to be inexpensive. Daily expenses for food, transportation, toiletries, and clothing are cheap by American standards, but they add up. Beyond that, most of you are unaccustomed to using cash to the extent you will use it in Tunisia. **When you're constantly using cash to pay for things, you not only become more acutely aware of your spending habits, but you also have to worry about things like having enough cash on hand at all times.** The amount of money you can expect to spend depends on your own personal interests and habits.

**Roundtrip airfare, local transportation, textbooks, and other personal expenses are not included in the program fee** and may be significantly less than in the US. Please see the [estimated out-of-pocket costs](#) for such items. Estimated costs of common personal expenses are as follows:

- ◊ Meals in Tunis range from 5 TND (\$2.00) for local food to 50+ TND (\$18+) for fancier restaurants
- ◊ A 1.5-liter bottle of water costs 0.70 TND (\$0.26)
- ◊ Shampoo costs around 7–13 TND depending on size (\$2.50–\$5)
- ◊ Dress shirts range from 50–100 TND (\$19–\$37)
- ◊ A kilogram of tomatoes is 1.20 TND (\$0.45)
- ◊ A box of cereal is 4 TND (\$1.50) for local brands and 11+ TND (\$4+) for imports
- ◊ A cup of coffee is 1.50 TND (\$0.56) and a croissant is 1 TND (\$0.37)
- ◊ A carton of milk is 1.25 TND (\$0.46)
- ◊ Public transit (Metro/Bus) ranges from 0.600–1 TND (\$0.22–\$0.37)
- ◊ Bolt and taxis range from \$1–\$5 during the day. At night, prices go up, but generally not more than \$7 to go across Tunis. This is a significant expense as it adds up!

Participants who are extremely cost-conscious and limit themselves to very few indulgences can budget for as **little as \$300 a month**, although some students find themselves spending **upwards of \$1000/month** when including recreational activities, weekend trips, and souvenirs.

*The Amideast program fee includes:*

- ◊ Pre-departure services, materials, and preparation
- ◊ All courses
- ◊ All onsite staff support, including 24/7 emergency support
- ◊ All-inclusive onsite orientation
- ◊ Housing and most meals with an Arabic-speaking Tunisian host family
- ◊ Numerous additional meals and events
- ◊ All program-organized excursions per session
- ◊ All extra- and co-curricular activities
- ◊ Medical insurance, including medical evacuation and repatriation, and political and natural disaster evacuation coverage (students are covered for the duration of the program)
- ◊ Amideast Grade Report
- ◊ Program-supplied mobile phone for use in Tunisia (usage charges not included)

## Tipping

Tunisians in the service industry (baggage handlers, museum guides, etc.) **expect to receive a small tip** of 3–8 TND. In inexpensive cafes, you can just leave a few coins. In more upscale restaurants, Tunisians usually leave a tip and do not go below 15% unless the service has been abysmal. **There will be a 19% VAT added to the bill; this isn't optional.** It is not necessary for you to tip a taxi driver. It may be difficult in general to get change for large bills, so try to carry coins and bills in small denominations.

All  
of the  
following is  
covered in more  
detail in the  
pre-departure webinars  
and onsite orientation.

## Health, Safety, & Security

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) provide current information for travelers. There are **no vaccinations required for travel** to Tunisia; however, the CDC does provide suggestions. We recommend that you consult your physician prior to departure for any supplemental advice.

The [US Department of State's website](#) is a source of current information regarding travel to Tunisia, and we strongly suggest that you read it.

**Amideast requires that all students who are US passport holders register in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP),** a free service that registers your upcoming travel with the nearest American embassy or consulate. Please see the information on this program in the "Smart Traveler Enrollment Program" section above. Non-US citizens should register with their country's embassy or consulate in Tunis.

### The US Embassy in Tunis

1053 Les Berges Du Lac Walkway, Tunis

Mailing address: Les Berges Du Lac  
Walkway, 1053 Tunis, Tunisia

Tel.: +216-71-107-000

Fax: +216-71-107-090

<http://tn.usembassy.gov/>

## Insurance

As part of the program fee, **Amideast provides medical and accident insurance for all students** through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). Once in-country, Amideast program staff help students deal with medical issues as they arise and have a list of recommended providers and hospitals both in the host city and in areas visited on excursions.

**Please review the policy information that is sent to your email so you are aware of what is covered by CISI Insurance.**

Approximately 2-4 weeks prior to the start of your program, you will receive a “Welcome Package” from CISI directly into your email. This will include your personal insurance card, information on your policy, and the instructions to set up your own online account with CISI. We recommend you print a copy of the card to bring with you to your host country.

If you need to receive a letter to verify your insurance coverage to meet a scholarship requirement, please complete the [\*\*Request for Insurance Verification Form\*\*](#).

## Staying Healthy: Before Traveling and In-Country

It is important to maintain good health and well-being when studying abroad. Becoming sick, needing medical attention, spending days in bed, and delaying getting help when you think you might need it can be frustrating and overwhelming, with repercussions for how much you are able to enjoy and get out of your experience. **You can prepare for your time in Tunisia by reading about health risks and becoming aware of the dangers associated with the places you'll be visiting, how Amideast can support you,**

**and what you begin to do and explore now to better manage your expectations of your time abroad and develop strategies for building and maintaining your well-being and resilience.**

In addition to the resources available in the [\*\*Student Portal\*\*](#), our required pre-departure webinar series (made available to you via Amideast Online) includes an in-depth module on health, safety, and security, in addition to a separate webinar on issues of identity and intersectionality. While the webinar focusing on identity and intersectionality is not about health, safety, and security, it covers important host country context for beginning to understand social and legal discourses related to race and colorism, gender, sex, and sexuality, disability, religion, labor, and many other issues. **With this context and additional resources, you will begin to develop an understanding about how identity and intersectionality might impact issues of health, safety, and security in you host country and among participants on the program.**



**will begin to develop an understanding about how identity and intersectionality might impact issues of health, safety, and security in you host country and among participants on the program.**



If you start by keep the following basic guidelines in mind, you can reduce the risk of serious illness or injury during your stay:

- ◊ **Traffic accidents are the biggest risk to the health of education abroad students.** Always stay alert as a pedestrian and make safe, informed decisions when traveling by road. Never assume a car will stop for you or steer out of the way. Stay on sidewalks away from the curb and walk facing on-coming traffic whenever possible.
- ◊ **Always wash your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the bathroom,** and as often as possible when venturing out into less sanitary areas (it is helpful to carry hand sanitizer with you).
- ◊ **Be wary of food from street vendors,** especially uncooked foods that include vegetables and fruits, and make sure that meat products are always **fully** cooked.
- ◊ Poor refrigeration, undercooked meat, and raw fruits and vegetables improperly washed often lead to health problems such as diarrhea, food poisoning and, on rare occasions, parasites. **If you do get sick, drink plenty of fluids and consider seeing a doctor** if you do not feel better in a day or two. Give your body time to adjust to the new types of foods you will be eating and to build a tolerance for the different ways food is prepared and handled.
- ◊ **Dairy products should be pasteurized and properly stored** (long-life milk is not refrigerated when you purchase it, but it must be refrigerated after opening).
- ◊ Always remember to **check the expiration date on products, especially food and medicines.**
- ◊ To avoid possible insect-borne diseases, **apply bug spray** if you notice mosquitoes, ticks, or fleas.
- ◊ **Do not touch or pet animals on the street or in the wild,** as bites and scratches can lead to serious infections. This includes the cute cats on the street and in cafes! Do not touch them and avoid the chance of having to get rabies shots.
- ◊ **Wear sunscreen of SPF 30 or greater** to protect your skin from the sun, and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated when out in the heat.
- ◊ **For sexually active students, the rules abroad are the same as they are at home – you need to practice safe sex.** To reduce the risk of an unwanted pregnancy or contracting any sexually transmitted disease, you should always use appropriate contraceptives, such as condoms or other forms of barrier protection. **Because the culture surrounding contraceptives in the Middle East and North Africa differs from what you may be used to, we recommend that you pack some condoms and/or barrier protection and contraceptives for your time overseas** (regardless of whether you plan to engage in sexual activity). The least risky activity is to avoid sexual activity altogether while overseas. If you choose to be sexually active while abroad, please take control of your sexual health.

As with all things in life,

#### **STUDY ABROAD COMES WITH UNCERTAINTY.**

Despite all the planning in the world, things happen, schedules will have to change, there will be things that can't be decided or done until the last minute. Acceptance of that will go a long way and help you mitigate stress and challenges. Tunisia has always been more event oriented than time oriented, but this is hardly unique to Tunisia. Your ability to be flexible, go with the flow, and have a sense of humor goes a long way.

## Health Services

Amideast is not a university, and therefore **does not have an on-site health facility, health staff, or pharmacy**. However, there are clean, safe, and well-equipped hospitals and clinics in Tunis, as well as excellent, qualified doctors and practitioners in all specialties related to mental and physical health. Amideast keeps a list of private clinics and has a number of relationships with doctors and counselors and will provide students with recommendations and assistance as needed. **Amideast will assist students seeking medical care during their time in Tunis.** Students and host families are provided with emergency telephone numbers for use should they become necessary.

## Exercise & Fitness

As Amideast is not a university, it does not have a gym or fitness equipment. **Gyms are excellent and plentiful, however, and most are happy to offer you a good rate for the semester.** Once you arrive in Tunisia, interested students should talk to the on-site staff to understand the gym options to figure out which one is best for you.

Running or jogging outdoors is not as common as it is in countries like the US and many participants have found themselves targets of harassment while jogging. Many of the streets are also crowded and uneven, but there are some areas that are better suited for running or jogging. Our staff can suggest these locations, and they are also willing to help try to **connect students with clubs** that play sports or with language partners who might also play the same sport.



## Water

**Although tap water is clean in most major cities, Amideast recommends that students DO NOT drink Tunisian tap water.** Tap water is fine for brushing teeth and taking showers, but consumption should be avoided to prevent diarrhea and other bacterial infections.

**Bottled water is readily available**, though you should always make sure that it is properly sealed. Amideast and most host family homes will have water coolers available.

**Do not swim in any fresh water or canals in the MENA region or drink unfiltered water outside of major cities**, as you risk contracting bacterial infections, hepatitis, and/or the parasitic disease schistosomiasis. Drinking lots of clean water, washing your hands regularly, avoiding sharing utensils or water bottles, getting enough rest, and keeping a positive attitude will go a long way toward keeping you healthy during your study abroad experience.

## Safety and Security

Amideast takes issues of safety and security very seriously and does everything in its power to ensure that students have a healthy, safe and secure environment. **Amideast's longstanding physical presence in Tunisia has enabled it to develop an extensive network of contacts and a very positive reputation among Tunisians.** Amideast/Tunisia's Country Director maintains close ties to the Regional Security Officer at the US Embassy and local program staff members are included in the US Embassy warden network. Amideast is a member of the Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council and also reviews other sources of information from international organizations, news media, and informal networks within the region. Most of the staff at Amideast are Tunisian, and many have worked for Amideast for years. **They maintain a vital local network and contribute to the understanding of ongoing and developing situations on the ground.**

Amideast facilities are accessible only through controlled entrances that are guarded 24 hours a day. Local staff are able to simultaneously send out text messages (SMS) to all students' mobile phones to update them instantly on issues related to safety and security. For this purpose, Amideast utilizes the older technology of non-smart ("brick" or "burner" phones), SMS messaging, and phone calls because they are most reliable in case of emergency, whereas apps that rely on networks and digital technology are vulnerable and can easily fail. **We count on participants to appreciate this, and to follow Amideast policies, procedures, and guidance related to communication.**

While neither Amideast nor any other institution or program provider can guarantee that accidents won't happen or that unexpected security situations won't arise, Amideast does take these matters very seriously and continually monitors the local environment. Amideast also continually updates safety and security procedures and has contingency plans in place to respond effectively should unforeseen events occur. Finally, a superb communications infrastructure links Amideast's headquarters office in Washington, DC, with the local Amideast center in Tunisia, and key staff members are available around the clock to respond to emergency situations.

Amideast advises all students to read the [US State Department's Country Specific information for Tunisia](#).

## General Safety Tips

- ◊ **Do not carry your passport with you** (unless you are leaving your host city), but always carry a copy of your passport information page, along with another form of identification.
- ◊ **Avoid mannerisms that draw attention to you:** smiling at people you don't already know as you walk down the street, speaking boisterously in public, gesticulating intensely, or making eye contact. While these things may be normal and even friendly in your home country, they can draw unwanted attention while in Tunisia.
- ◊ **Traveling with a friend or in a small group is better** than traveling alone. Walking with someone else helps deflect approaches by people who might bother you.

ALWAYS TELL SOMEONE WHERE  
YOU ARE GOING AND WHEN YOU  
EXPECT TO RETURN



- ◊ If you are out at night, **always walk with someone else**. If you visit friends alone in the evening, ask them to escort you home or until you are in a Bolt or taxi.
- ◊ **Always** tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- ◊ If you want to visit a new neighborhood, **make your first visit during the day**. Familiarize yourself with a map of the area before you go. Note nearby landmarks and the nearest sources of public transportation and routes.
- ◊ **Be aware of purse snatching, pick pocketing, and other thefts** as they do occur in Tunisia; even in broad daylight and especially in busy marketplaces and tourist areas. If someone threatens you and demands your belongings, give them up. Your safety is more important than your belongings.
- ◊ Never put your wallet or any kind of mobile phone (particularly iPhones) **in your back pocket**, in a backpack outside pocket, or in a coat/jacket pocket. Wallets and mobiles in the back pocket of your pants make for an attractive target.
- ◊ If you have any concerns about the city, **speak to Amideast staff**. Your safety is one of their goals, and as locals they will be able to give you more detailed information about areas you may want to avoid.

## Safety in Bolts and Taxis

**Bolt (a rideshare app like Uber) and taxis are the most ubiquitous and efficient way to travel around Tunisia.** Using the metro or bus system is generally safe, though very crowded and often delayed. Petty theft on public transport is always a risk, as in any major city, so we generally recommend using Bolt or taxis. Our staff will provide more information on ridership safety during onsite orientation.

If you are going to use a taxi, you can hail one from any location, but make sure you are in a safe place to get in the taxi from the street. However, in some areas or at certain times of day, it will be easier to find a Bolt driver. If using a taxi, **make sure the driver turns on his meter**; remind him if he doesn't do it right away. **Be sure to have small bills/coins** (0.5–5 TND, depending on the trip) and a landmark close to your destination. Official street names aren't regularly used, so **having a well-known landmark will help with navigation**. Your host family may be able to help identify landmarks in the vicinity of your desired destination(s).

## Public Gatherings

North Africa and Tunisia have changing political climates, which can often lead to protests, demonstrations, and strikes. Protests are of special concern for foreigners in Tunisia.

**Students are required to stay away from public demonstrations and should always avoid areas prone to instability and disorder.**

## Alcohol & Drugs

Being a more conservative Muslim country, it is discouraged to purchase or consume alcohol. If you do decide to drink, be mindful of the following:

- ◊ If you plan to drink, **always drink in moderation**. It is inappropriate to return to your host family's home intoxicated or smelling like alcohol. Please have a safe and viable plan for getting home and being sober any time you consume alcohol.
- ◊ If there is a group function where alcohol may be present, and you would like to invite your language partner or other Tunisian friends to attend, **let them know there may be alcohol present**.
- ◊ As anywhere, be careful where and with whom you drink, and **always maintain a buddy system**.
- ◊ Alcohol is cheaper than in the US, but is not available in all neighborhoods.
- ◊ Most bad incidents that have happened on this program in the past have involved **misuse of alcohol** — which makes this environment not that much different from that on your home campus. Please be mindful of that, act accordingly, and look out for one another.

Do not use illegal drugs during your time abroad. The use of illegal drugs is not only a health risk but also puts you at risk for arrest:

- ◊ The legal ramifications of using illegal drugs abroad can be very serious, and **your home government cannot get a citizen out of jail overseas if he or she has been convicted of a drug offense abroad**.
- ◊ **The social and cultural consequences of using drugs can be different in a foreign country.** This behavior may be viewed very negatively by your new acquaintances abroad. Drug penalties in Tunisia are strict, and Tunisians view illegal drugs much more harshly than Americans as a result. Use of illegal drugs puts not only yourself, but your host family, Tunisian friends, your entire cohort, and Amideast at great risk.



# Section IV: Background Information

## Tunis, Tunisia

Your program is based in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, situated on the Mediterranean Sea's Gulf of Tunis. Though Tunisia is the smallest country in North Africa, Tunis is the fourth largest city in the region and roughly 2 million people call it home. The majority of Tunisians are mixed Amazigh and Arab descent and 99% of the population is Sunni Muslim, though small minority populations of Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Baha'is exist.

From the French colonial buildings of downtown to the sprawling Tunis Medina and the ancient city of Carthage a short drive away, Tunisia's vibrant history and Arabic, African, and European influences are easily gleaned from Tunis' varied architecture. A country with a rich and diverse history, natural beauty, and strong political engagement, Tunisia is an exciting and rewarding place to live and study.

## Tunisian Society & Culture

Characteristics of Tunisian society are similar to those found elsewhere in the Arab world. **Life revolves around the family, and people have many duties and obligations to both their immediate and extended family members.** Nuclear, and rarely extended, families occupy the same house, and most people continue to live with their parents until they are married.

**Religion plays a major role in daily life**, with the call to prayer coming from every mosque five times a day. Tunisia is a civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law. While Islam is the official religion of the country, Tunisia is a secular state. Further, Tunisia is known in the Arab world for its stance on women's equality and it is home to one of the most progressive gender parity laws in the world.



Some Tunisians may have negative views of the US government because of what they regard as its total support for Israel, as well as the US involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bear in mind that the last several years, marked by uprisings, counterrevolutions, and socioeconomic upheaval across the region, have been very difficult for Tunisia in numerous ways. Nonetheless, many Tunisians have American friends, most are extremely friendly towards Americans, and differentiate much better than Americans can between a country's government and policies and its citizens.



You should also keep in mind that your fellow Amideast students may themselves have a variety of very firmly held views on these topics. You may very well disagree with some of them, sometimes strongly. We would encourage you to be conscious of the fact that **these are extremely sensitive issues in Tunisia**, and be cautious when discussing them, remembering that you are a guest in Tunisia.

**Ideas about family and reputation relate to your stay in Tunisia.** You can earn respect for yourself by upholding your best behavior, but you can harm the reputation of Tunisian friends and associates if you behave inappropriately (e.g., appearing intoxicated in public, engaging in particular kinds of overly romantic behavior, etc.).

**While you may have differing views from those with whom you live and study,** you should always approach any discussions of socioeconomic issues, international affairs, and politics in Tunisia (both with Tunisians and with your fellow Amideast students) with respect.

## Social Events & Festivities

**Ramadan is the holy month of fasting and is the most festive period of the year in Tunisia.** Since the Islamic calendar is lunar, Ramadan falls eleven days earlier each successive year. All Muslims (except children, the sick, the elderly, and other groups as stipulated by the Qur'an) abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset. Muslims spend more time praying (with higher attendance at mosques), visiting friends and family, and giving alms during Ramadan than at any other time of the year. It is a month of contrasts: celebration and reflection; relaxation and strict discipline.



**Tunisian social events range from intimate gatherings at home to public outings.** Invitations for visits to Tunisian homes should be readily accepted, as you will be treated with great hospitality. Generally, you will be invited for a meal, though you may also experience an invitation just to "be together." Tea and coffee may be offered, along with sheesha (water pipe/hookah) for a few hours of pure socializing and talking.

**Tunisians also socialize by going to public parks,** strolling along the seaside and lakes, visiting malls, restaurants, and engaging in many other activities that are also common in the US. As is true in many Arab countries, Tunisians love sitting in a café drinking tea and smoking sheesha, preferably while watching a soccer match on television.

## Religion

Approximately 99% of Tunisians are Muslim. Throughout your time in the country, you will be exposed to **many aspects of the daily practice of Islam**. From hearing the call to prayer five times a day, to seeing women wearing the veil, to hearing Quranic recitation in shops, you will be immersed in aspects of Muslim religious culture. If you visit a mosque, appropriate dress is essential; bare shoulders and shorts are inappropriate, and for women, the head must be covered.

More common than visits to mosques will be your presence around people who are praying. In Tunisia, like many Muslim countries, not everyone goes to the mosque for prayers, as **it is acceptable to pray at home or at work**. You may see many people stop in the middle of activity to pray. General etiquette requires that you do not disturb people praying; do not talk loudly or walk in front of them. You will also hear the Call to Prayer five times a day. While this may take some getting used to and might wake you up at dawn your first week in Tunisia; **remember to be respectful when discussing it or referring to it with your Tunisian friends**.

**Most people in Tunisia see their faith as part of their identity**, even if they do not actively practice their religion. Because of this, you will be exposed to outward displays of religion throughout your time in Tunisia, including the use of many phrases with the word Allah (the Arabic word for God).

**In general, students are expected to be respectful of all religious and cultural differences**. The staff in Tunisia will discuss this with you during orientation and will — throughout the term — point out if your behavior is inappropriate.

Also note that **proselytizing is illegal in Tunisia**. You are free to practice your religion but any acts that could be interpreted as proselytizing should be avoided, even if that is not your intention.

Finally, **do not argue or debate religion** with people with whom you are not familiar and comfortable.



## Social Relations

Social rules, both formal and informal, governing social interactions vary substantially depending on the circumstances. Though foreigners are sometimes “exempt” from traditional customs governing social relations, **it is still best to observe how Tunisians interact among themselves to get an idea of what is appropriate.**

While our webinar on identity and intersectionality (available as part of the pre-departure series hosted on Amideast Online) explores this in more detail, it bears mentioning here that **public discourse in Tunisia is heteronormative and holds that sex is binary, and sexual intimacy happens between men and women in the context of marriage.** Relations between men and women, even when a foreigner is involved, are still subject to public scrutiny in Tunisia.

A large segment of Tunisian society values traditional gender roles, and interactions that are common between members of the opposite sex in your home country may be considered suspect in Tunisia. You will find many people, however, comfortable with social relations to you which you are more accustomed. **Your interactions with Tunisian society depend largely upon how well you know the person and the specific situation.**

**Friendships between and among men and between and among women in Tunisia are generally more intimate**, even in public, than they may be in your home environment. Friends will make intense eye contact, smile, and touch, while greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek and a long handshake. Friends of the same sex may walk arm-in-arm in public. If a Tunisian friend treats you in this fashion, it generally means that you are viewed as an equal and accepted as a friend.

**Close friendships between women and men are common, but rules depend extensively on how familiar you are with those involved and the specific circumstances of a friendship.** Take your cue from Tunisians you meet about handshakes, eye contact, and other boundaries; **if in doubt, talk to program staff.**

Dating practices in Tunisia may differ significantly from those to which you may be accustomed, but there are also **many variations within Tunisian society**. Generally, dating occurs in public venues and includes activities such as going to movies, cafes and restaurants, going to social clubs, or taking walks. Intimate time in a private setting, such as an apartment or house, is uncommon. Couples who spend the night together might offend neighbors' sensibilities, and the couple may experience reprisals from the doorman or landlord. Intimate or affectionate behavior, such as kissing, is very uncommon in public. Hugging and holding hands has become more common among young couples in Tunisia.



## Things to Keep in Mind

- ◊ As with any kind of relationship, **please approach opposite-gender relationships with caution at first**, until you understand acceptable behavior. Observe how Tunisians around you behave, and follow the lead of your Tunisian peers, and discuss with program staff if you have questions.
- ◊ **Foreign men should not approach or converse with Tunisian women if they have not been properly introduced and should act more reserved when in the presence of Tunisian women.** Too much attention may be misinterpreted (as interest in marriage or sex) and compromise a woman's honor and reputation. Participants identifying and/or presenting as men should observe the social distance that exists between men and women and avoid behaviors and language that suggest familiarity or intimacy.
- ◊ Participants identifying and/or presenting as women already know that men frequently interpret their existence in space as an openness to intimacy to which they as men are entitled. **While this has particular nuances in the Tunisian context, in most ways the underlying notion is no different.**
- ◊ You will **not be subject to the same dating rules** as the most conservative classes of Tunisians, but you should be aware that not all practices to which you are accustomed are acceptable in Tunisia.
- ◊ Interactions between and among anyone in public **should conform to Tunisian standards of conduct.**



## Cultural Adjustment

Many students choose to study abroad to experience living in a new and different culture. Studying in Tunisia is a fulfilling and rewarding experience, though **adapting to the new environment is not always easy**. The stress of cultural adjustment is experienced differently by each student, but there are some common stages that many will encounter. It is difficult to assess in advance the degree to which the process of cultural adjustment will affect you but preparing yourself prior to departure and understanding your reactions as you experience them will aid in successful adaptation.

Amideast Education Abroad Programs are structured to include opportunities for students to humbly develop their intercultural competence. Through each program component, students on Amideast programs in Tunisia are consistently encouraged and expected to look below the surface and search for deeper understanding of how Tunisians perceive the world around them. **Even the simple awareness that there is so much beneath the surface helps participants begin to adapt their behavior to Tunisian norms while on program.** Over the course of the program, that awareness deepens and much of it begins to turn into knowledge, limited as it may be in the short span of a program. This process can later be used in other cultural contexts to become truly effective intercultural communicators in a wide range of contexts both at home and abroad.

## Things to Keep in Mind

- ◊ Before going to Tunisia, you should **acquaint yourself with the basic outlines of Tunisian culture and history**. In addition to the resources we have included via Amideast Online, you have access to your universities' wonderful library systems, and Google is at your fingertips. Please use these resources.
- ◊ **Your adjustment to your new surroundings and to Tunisian culture will be easier** if you are willing and able to manage frustration well, try new things, understand your strengths and weaknesses, step out of your comfort zone, be flexible with schedule changes, interact with people from diverse backgrounds, and be ready to laugh at yourself and your new surroundings.
- ◊ You will experience Tunisia in your own way, and it is best to come without preconceived notions, unrealistic goals, or expectations. **Remain open minded**.
- ◊ **Please don't hesitate to seek out the help of a mental health professional if you need it.** Delaying the intervention of a mental health professional can be one of the most disruptive and destructive things to your study abroad experience. Amideast staff are ready to discuss any problems/concerns you may encounter, and help you find the professional resources you need.

## End of the Program

While it may seem like a way off, before you know it you will have completed your Amideast Program and be an Amideast Education Abroad alum. While Amideast currently has limited capacity to have a very active alumni organization, we do try to have outreach and activities from time to time in and beyond the DC area.

We do have great opportunities to stay in contact with you in the virtual space, and we want to highlight the amazing things you are doing and offer you opportunities to keep networking, growing, and shining professionally.

Amideast recently launched the **Amideast Leaders, Alumni, and Mentors (ALAM)** network to engage you and your peers around the world. Shortly before the end of your time abroad, you will be invited to join ALAM on **Localized**, an exciting new platform designed for alumni of programs like those run by Amideast, where we offer personal and professional network, development, and programming opportunities by connecting you with experts and peers in a huge range of topics. Localized connects Amideast program alumni from all over the MENA regions and from our US participants in Education Abroad programs.

On the alumni section of our website you can also **request your grade report/transcript** and find a link to review your Amideast program. It is important to keep your contact information current so that we can be in touch with you about alumni opportunities. Please notify us if your e-mail address changes by writing to [EdAbroad@amideast.org](mailto:EdAbroad@amideast.org).



## Pre-Departure Checklist

Getting excited for your program? Although we've covered all this in the handbook, here is a handy quick reference checklist! Make sure you've done these things before your departure.

*Months before:*

- ◊ Check that your passport is **valid for at least 6 months after your expected departure** from Tunisia. If not, renew as soon as possible and update your Student Portal with the new info!
- ◊ Visit your doctor(s) and dentist for any check ups or prescription renewals.
- ◊ Make sure your credit/debit cards don't expire while you're abroad. If they do, order new ones!
- ◊ Be sure to complete ALL materials in the [Student Portal](#). Our staff relies on this info to prepare for your stay!
- ◊ Buy your flight and enter the info in your [Student Portal](#). Flight info needs to be entered one month before departure to arrange your pick up.
- ◊ Follow Amideast EdAbroad on social media and read [what our bloggers](#) have had to say.
- ◊ Complete all activities in Amideast Online as part of your **pre-departure orientation**. Info on how to access this platform is in your [Student Portal](#).
- ◊ Check all electronics you plan to bring for power adaptors; many have built in power adaptors, but you'll still need plug adaptors. Figure out how many/what type you'll need.
- ◊ Purchase your course books (list in your [Student Portal](#)) so they have time to arrive before you depart.
- ◊ Review all of your home institution policies; you're responsible for being informed!

*1—2 weeks before:*

- ◊ Call your bank & credit cards to let them know you'll be traveling.
- ◊ Set up your [student insurance portal with CISI](#). You'll get an email with instructions.
- ◊ Input your flight info into the [WorldAware portal](#). You'll get an email with instructions.
- ◊ Register with your [home embassy](#).
- ◊ Make sure to **leave copies** of your passport, credit/debit cards, and Amideast Tunisia & DC contact info with a family member.
- ◊ Be sure you know all your **passwords** for banking, school/library access, and other accounts you may want to access while abroad.

*Before you depart for the airport, be sure you have these things with you:*

- ◊ Passport
- ◊ Insurance card and information (sent to you via email)
- ◊ Emergency cash
- ◊ Tunisia and Washington, DC staff contact information (in this handbook!)
- ◊ Baggage contains a durable name tag and adheres to airline weight requirements



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