

Update: 12/17/21



Dear ISI Abroad Partners and Students,



We would like to take this opportunity to address the recent change in the CDC and State Department advisory levels for Italy, which have been raised from level 3 to level 4. Like many, ISI Abroad has come to realize that although this may be a necessary bureaucratic change based on pre-established new case statistics, case numbers alone are only part of the overall reality and assessment. Our Health, Safety, and Risk Assessment team has been closely monitoring every detail with careful consideration of all factors including preventative measures such as the Super Green Pass, pre- and post-arrival testing for all immigration into Italy, the high vaccination rates, our current experiences, stats for vaccinated age-groups, healthcare infrastructure, the omicron variant data and more. All in all, Italy remains one of the safest destinations in the EU, and favorably compares to most US states.

At ISI Abroad we feel confident that our late spring semester start in February, stringent anti-covid governmental policies, our first-hand experience in hosting students, and the extremely low-risk to vaccinated and boosted students, allows us — at this time — to proceed as planned with the spring 2022 semester, which will begin much later than usual on **February 4, 2022** (Perugia) and **February 3, 2022** (Florence). This decision, also shared by nearly all 139 AACUPI members (American Association of College and University Programs in Italy), comes in view of the following:

ISI Abroad Fall Semester - Zero Covid Cases

As you know, the 2021 Fall Semester at ISI Florence and ISI Perugia (The Umbra Institute) ended last week. Our two programs served over 150 students; one-third of them were first-year first-semester students. We are pleased to report that they all had an excellent, safe, and rewarding study abroad experience, as their program evaluations testify. Our anti-Covid preventive measures, which can be found on our websites, worked exceptionally well

([Florence](#) / [Perugia](#)). Students were very cooperative and compliant. They all agreed that the restrictions made them feel safe, and yet did not greatly hinder their study abroad experience. As a consequence, zero Covid cases were reported at either ISI Florence or Umbra Institute this Fall Semester. Also, the institute activities and services (airport pickup, orientation, in-person classes, excursions, museum visits, etc.) took place smoothly and without any incident. This reconfirms our confidence in our well-established health, safety, and security measures.

The CDC's and State Department Levels

Elevated designations, particularly at this time, are not only based on pre-established (and likely outdated) parameters, but also aimed at curtailing extensive travel during the holiday season and early winter months. As the holidays and colder months pass, we understand that — all things being equal — the designation will likely be lowered after the holiday season, should the omicron variant show little or no increased overall risk.

Italy Travel Policies and Restrictions

As you may be aware, Italy has Europe's most stringent anti-Covid measures. No travel, nor indoor activities are permitted without a Super Green Pass (or CDC White Card for US students), which documents that the person is fully vaccinated (and boosted as well). These vaccination requirements are also coupled with pre-departure and arrival testing required for all incoming travelers, even fully-vaccinated and boosted. Overall, this makes Italy one of the safest countries in regard to freedom of movement. It is difficult to think of more prudent measures that could be employed to protect Italian citizens and visitors.

In addition, Italy has recently extended the “covid emergency decree” (which was introduced at the start of the pandemic) to March 31, 2022. This decree gives greater powers to the central government, making it easier for officials to bypass the bureaucracy that smothers much decision-making in Italy. The extension was a judicious and necessary decision, and done also to protect the special unemployment funding (FIS) and social services which would have ended prematurely this month. It also allowed the government to maintain the COVID-related policies on vaccination, Green Pass, and other preventative measures. In short, the extension of the emergency decree did not change the ongoing policies in Italy; it simply extended them till

March to allow services and restrictions to continue uninterrupted and will help us ensure that the spring semester is as safe as possible.

Vaccinated and Boosted

All ISI Abroad staff, faculty and students will have been full-vaccinated and boosted prior to the start of the spring semester. The few Italian citizens (about 15 per cent) who have not received their first dose yet (mostly children through age 13) are getting it now, also because of the even stricter guidelines that the government enforced in response to the Omicron variant and the upcoming holiday season. Currently, Italy has administered at least 103,104,085 doses of COVID vaccines so far (population of 59.5 million). Assuming every person needs 2 doses, that's enough to have vaccinated about 85.5% of the country's population. (*Source: [Reuters](#)*). And although new cases of covid (for all variants) will be part of our daily lives no matter where we are, studies have shown that boosters provide a high-level of protection against variants, which also greatly mitigates or virtually eliminates threat of serious illness in the 18-25 age group.

Late Spring Semester Start

As early as last May — as you know — ISI Abroad decided to delay the start of the spring semester till 2022. This was specifically done to avoid the January winter month and to push the semester later into the spring, when it may be less affected by covid. We all know by now that covid tends to rise during the winter months. We are confident that Italy's alert level will return to 3 before or shortly after the start of our Spring Semester in early February.

AACUPI Programs Responses - No Change in Plans

A recent poll was taken by the AACUPI (American Association of Colleges and University Programs in Italy) asking the program directors of their intentions for the spring semester. All institutions polled indicated that they intend to proceed with the next spring semester as planned, specifically given that Italy has the most stringent covid prevention policies in place, and that their entire academic community will have been fully-vaccinated and boosted. Likewise, ISI Abroad intends to move forward confidently with the spring 2022 semester, as well as our Maymester and summer programs.

All in all, given Italian government's strict anti-covid domestic and travel-related policies (pre- and post-arrival testing required for all), our entire academic community having been vaccinated and boosted, the Institute's effective preventative measures, the well-established healthcare and testing services available, and our valuable experience managing a large cohort of students this fall, we feel confident that both the incoming students and our entire academic community will be in the safest environment possible. All of these reasons make us look forward to the spring semester in February.

As always, ISI Abroad will provide further updates and guidance prior to the start of the spring semester. We take this opportunity to wish you once again a happy holiday season and invite you – as usual – to email us, should you have any questions.

Best regards,

ISI Abroad

Health, Safety, and Risk Assessment Committee

