

A photograph of a person with dark hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt and dark pants, standing in a grassy field and looking towards a large, leafy tree. The tree has many long, brown, pod-like seed pods hanging from its branches. In the background, there are other trees and a clear sky. The text 'COUNTRY OVERVIEW' is overlaid in white on a dark green rectangular background on the left side of the image.

# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

# & PACKING GUIDELINES

Rwanda: Post-Genocide Restoration and Peacebuilding  
Fall 2021



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# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Rwanda is one of the smallest countries on the planet; it is comparable in size to Haiti or the state of Maryland in the United States. Rwanda is inhabited by close to 12 million people and is accordingly one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Rwanda's population is predominantly rural and subsistence agriculture employs the majority of Rwanda's population by far. Almost all the food supply in Rwanda's cities and towns is grown by over 80% of the people, who live on and farm their own small farms.

The tragic event of the 1994 genocide has reconstituted Rwandan identity and, in tandem with government policy, there is a deliberate effort to erase Hutu, Tutsi and Twa identities and to construct a single Rwandan identity. The national language is Kinyarwanda and it is spoken unanimously by all Rwandans countrywide. Approximately 30% also speak English and/or French. Some people, especially in towns and business centers, may also be able to communicate using Kiswahili. Expect to be challenged by the language barrier as Rwandans generally take much pride in their native language, and speak Kinyarwanda most of the time. Kinyarwanda is also the official language, in addition to English and French.

Kigali, where you will spend most of your time is very clean, as well as safer than most capitals in the region. The city is metropolitan with many people from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania, who are either visiting or have resettled in Kigali. There has also been a rising influx of Westerners in the last decade. Kigali is modernizing at a fast pace, and you should find many of the comforts that are typical of western cities, although they come at significantly higher prices.

## CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Due to its high elevation, Rwanda's weather is pleasantly temperate and perhaps similar to coastal

California's climate. Although challenged by contemporary weather changes, rainfall generally comes in April and May with a shorter rainy season coming in October/November. Being at a higher elevation, the northwestern part of the country on the slopes of the Virunga Mountains tends to get very cold. Its many hills and mountains have earned Rwanda the title "country of 1000 hills." The eastern part of the country has undulating plains, which gradually transition into hills in Kigali, and steeper mountains in the northwest.

### KIGALI: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
73/66	73/66	73/66	73/66	73/66
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
77/66	75/66	73/66	73/64	

## LOCAL CUSTOMS

Rwandans regard greetings very highly and any conversation that a person initiates without a greeting may be considered rude. A light hand shake is the norm, but people that are more acquainted with one another may kiss on the cheek or hug one another. If you should arrive at the airport or are in a restaurant, break the ice by greeting: "*Muraho*" which means "how are you" (especially when meeting someone for the first time or you haven't seen each other in a while); "*Mwaramutse*" (good morning); and "*Mwiriwe*" (good afternoon). Generally people are friendly and will chuckle at your attempts to speak Kinyarwanda. Kigali is generally safe, especially compared to other cities in the region. In the streets, keep away from the well-kept lawns; find designated walkways all the time. Do not bring plastic bags and be sure to always dress nicely. Rwandans scorn shabbiness and dirty clothes especially in public places.



## DIET

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Rwandans have a typical tropical diet. Plantains, rice, potatoes, and cassava are typical main dishes and there is a wide choice of beef and chicken stews, peanuts, beans, peas, steamed vegetables, and fruits. In Rwanda, vegetarians may not have the luxury of tofu but certainly have a wide selection from which to pick. Breakfast is typically served between 6:30 and 8:00 AM, lunch between 12:00 and 2:00 PM, and dinner between 8:00 and 10:30 PM. Kigali is blessed with a variety of restaurants with Indian, Chinese, Italian influences as well as traditional African cuisines, so come prepared to try new foods and flavors.

## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested



calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

**SIT will require COVID-19 vaccination for all U.S. students. Recognizing that not all international students will have access to vaccines by Fall 2021, SIT asks that international students who wish to travel in and who do not have access to a vaccine apply for an accommodation by emailing your admissions counselor.**

The Health Guidelines and Requirements will also provide recommendations related to preventing the contraction and spread of COVID-19. Students will be provided with COVID-19 related information and requirements prior to your travel in order to provide you with the most up-to-date information. General information about SIT's response to COVID-19 can be found on our webpage here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety->

[and-well-being/risk-management/sit-health-and-safety-update-in-response-to-covid-19/](#)

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, accident and illness insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Due to COVID-19, there will be no homestays during the fall 21 semester. Instead you will stay in single rooms at a guesthouse near the SIT program center (10-15 minute walk). You will have independent and group meals. A stipend will be provided accordingly. Weekend meals with local university students, homestay family members, and other local partners will also be organized to allow students to further practice their language skills and build meaningful relationships with our community partners. For group meals at the guesthouse, students' meal preferences and any food allergies will be communicated to the chef.

During in-country excursions, students will stay in single rooms at a chosen hotel or guesthouse. In most cases, during excursions, students will have group meals but where possible a stipend will be provided in order to allow them to have meals independently. While in Kigali, laundry will be done at the hotel/guesthouse and SIT will cover the cost. However, on excursion, SIT will help students negotiate affordable fees for that service and they will cover it out of their own pockets.

You will arrange your own accommodation for the ISP/internship period, with ample guidance from program staff. ISP/internship accommodation may take the form of a rental apartment, or a house.

## TRANSPORTATION

You will receive a daily travel stipend to allow you move around the city easily. You will also be advised on safe and affordable transportation means in Kigali.

## COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

## PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone, or (d) bring a smart phone with an international plan. During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their cellphone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper



than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

SIT does provide Wi-Fi to students, and you can also use Internet cafes around Kigali. The rates are fairly affordable: approximately US\$0.50 per hour. There are some coffee shops around Kigali that provide wireless connections, so you can order a coffee and hook up to the net with your own laptop for free. Students may also choose to buy a USB modem that can allow them to have internet access wherever they are. A USB modem may cost approximately US \$30. Services may be much slower than what you are accustomed to in the US, so it would be wise to

establish an email account with a webmail service that is not graphics-heavy. It is also advisable not to rely on the Internet as a principal research tool. Sometimes services may be too slow to support Skype or other VOIP programs. Please note that there will also be times during the program when it is impossible or extremely inconvenient to access the Internet. Conducting an internship in a rural area will almost certainly mean no Internet access at all for the duration of the internship period. Consider informing friends and family that you will not be able to check email every day, and that they should not be alarmed if you do not respond to their mail immediately.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours.

## MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as



the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.

For this program, **DHL and FEDEX services are available in country.** Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If you decide to have something sent to you, posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

**Student Name**

c/o SIT Rwanda  
P.O. Box 4582  
Kigali, Rwanda

If you are aware that something is being sent to you, please notify the program staff. Due to the low volume of mail sent to students, SIT typically only checks the P.O. Box about once per week.

## MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. During the ISP/internship period, students will receive a stipend for basic room and board only, based on the cost of living at the program base. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP or internship are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

It is advisable to bring your funds in various forms so that if there is a problem with one

option you will still have access to money. Rwanda's currency is known as the Rwandan Franc (Amafaranga) and the highest banknote value is 5000. Cash is used for most daily transactions and the use of checks, traveler's checks, and credit/debit cards for *direct purchases* is rare. However due to covid-19, the government is encouraging cashless payments and in this case people use Mobile Money services. Program staff will help you register for Mobile Money system so you can easily do payments.

**Cash and Traveler's Checks:** Traveler's checks are rarely accepted, and they fetch **very poor** exchange rates. Small bills (up to \$20) also fetch very poor rates. Generally we recommend that you arrange to have multiple sources of your money: credit card (VISA and MasterCard) and cash, so that you can have back-up if one source is unavailable. If you need additional funds sent to you in Rwanda, the best option may be Western Union.

Be aware that you can keep your cash in the safe at the SIT office in Kigali.

**Credit cards** are not widely accepted in Rwanda. Usually only the most luxurious establishments welcome them. VISA is the preferred brand, and MasterCard is also useful. American Express is better left at home.

ATM machines are available in Rwanda, and a **VISA debit card** is the most common card and the easiest to use. Cash is needed in Kigali — the ATMs there cannot easily communicate with foreign banks. Nevertheless, certain banks in Kigali will allow you to purchase cash using ISA or MasterCard credit cards, though they charge a hefty commission for this service.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Above are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP/internship-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP, internship, or a specific personal expense.

Check current exchange rates:  
<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

## VISITORS AND FREE TIME

**SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term**, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to

Leisure activities:	\$100
ISP Translation	\$100
Books, printing, supplies:	\$100
Up-front medical costs:	\$200-\$300
Potential ISP/internship travel expenses:	\$200
COVID-19 Entry Test(s) (may be required for entry; subject to change and costs may vary)	\$100-250
Typical Internet café usage:	\$100
Estimated total:	\$900-\$1,150

visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations.

Given the current global health situation, SIT strongly advises against independent travel. Yet, if a student chooses to travel independently, they must have their independent travel approved in advance and they will be required to follow established independent travel protocols.

In fall 2021, independent travel requests for in-country destinations may be authorized under the following conditions: a) students are vaccinated; b) key COVID-19 metrics being monitored by SIT are favorable in the region being visited; c) there are no movement restrictions imposed by the host country government that would impede the travel and d) the independent travel request is submitted consistent with the process steps detailed in the Independent Travel Policy, to include submission of a detailed travel itinerary/lodging information within the proscribed timeframe so that a proper review can occur with the



Academic Director and the Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing Regional Manager.

Note: "Independent Travel" is defined as travel within the host country\* that: a) occurs during the program's defined enrollment period; b) is independently organized by a student; c) is unrelated to program activities; d) does not interfere with scheduled program activities; and e) involves an overnight stay.

SIT reserves the right to deny travel if the location is deemed unsafe for students or the student is in poor academic standing. If a student got approval for travel, and then developed symptoms or could not travel for any reason, SIT is not responsible for any lost payments or accrued fees due to cancellations of flights and hotel reservations. During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP/internship. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby

season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break

Students typically have four weeks to conduct research, gather and analyze data, write, and prepare for the ISP/internship presentation. There is a lot to cover, and students find the ISP/internship period a very busy time. For this reason, please plan to use your time wisely.



during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic

# PACKING GUIDELINES

## LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. Previous students have suggested bringing an additional smaller bag, which fits into your larger suitcase, for short excursions.]

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

## CLOTHING GUIDELINES

Rwandans pay a lot of attention to how they dress. Therefore sloppy clothes or clothes with immodest pictures or writing on them may generate unwanted attention or negative judgments towards one’s character. Revealing clothing, such as shorts or shirts with a low neckline, is inappropriate for both females and males. All clothing should be modest: shirts should cover the waist (no crop tops, sleeveless shirts, or bikinis), skirts should cover knees, and clothing should not be see-through. Flip-flops made out of rubber are for bathroom use ONLY; people don’t wear them on the street. The key guide to acceptable and appropriate dress is business casual. Night temperatures tend to drop especially at higher elevations. Therefore, you will need a light coat or fleece, and waterproof rainwear. An umbrella is absolutely recommended!

It is **not** acceptable to attend lectures, meetings with government representatives, memorial sites, or other official functions in shorts and t-shirts. Men should pack collared shirts and slacks as well as nicer jeans. Women should bring skirts that cover the knees and blouses or other shirts that respect the guidelines above, smart casual pants and jeans are also acceptable for women. Please note that you may buy additional clothing after you arrive, but clothing may be more expensive than in the US. For shoes, you are advised to bring comfortable but nice-looking shoes since you will always have to do some walking from the guest house to the program center or other places. During the rural excursions, shoes that completely cover your feet are always recommended.

## EQUIPMENT

Bring one or two small combination locks for the zippers of your luggage, and a travel alarm clock. You will need a small flashlight; past students have highly recommended bringing a headlamp as your flashlight. Mosquito nets will be provided at nearly all of your accommodations, but students who plan to travel to remote locations can also get a mosquito net in Kigali for US\$10-US\$15. If you wish to bring a mosquito net from the US, the kind that does not have a frame is best. If you have trouble finding one, Travel Medicine, Inc. has several good models: [www.travmed.com](http://www.travmed.com). Be advised to bring your own towel or be prepared to buy one when you arrive since some hotels used may not provide it or the one provided may not fits your preferences.

## COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is strongly recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smart phone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft. SIT



is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

Word-processing and printing can also be done at local cybercafés. Previous students have recommended bringing a digital recorder to use during interviews for the Independent Study Project. Make sure to also bring a large capacity flash drive for back-up and storage of data and photographs. SIT will provide you with a lockable drawer at the office where you can leave your valuables.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/> Be sure to come with the right adaptors: Rwanda uses Type C & J adaptor plugs.

## WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Personal items such as tampons, sanitary napkins, soap, body lotion, shampoo, contact solution, deodorant, and face wash are available but they may not be quite suitable to your needs and may be somewhat expensive. You may wish to bring a sufficient quantity for your entire stay or use what is locally available. Plan to bring hand-washable clothes. Bring an extra pair

of your glasses or contacts lenses. Be sure to bring contact lens solution to last the semester. In addition, bring your prescription in case you need it.

Please try to produce as little trash as possible. Therefore, unwrap anything you bought new and leave the wrappers back home. Also, think about the environment in regards to your personal hygiene – for example, mosquito repellent wipes or baby wipes pollute the environment and are better left at home. **Don't bring plastic bags as they are prohibited in Rwanda.**

## ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/>.

**Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!**

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.



# PACKING LIST

## CLOTHING

- 3-4 nice outfits (including skirts with hemlines below the knee but not necessarily too long; dresses; slacks; dress shirts; ties; blazers)
- 4-5 pairs of lightweight casual pants, trousers, khakis, or jeans
- 1-2 pairs of comfy pants for cold weather
- 4-6 light fabric blouses/polo shirts/collared shirts
- 1 pair of nice shoes
- supportive tennis shoes or sneakers (optional)
- 1 pair of comfortable sandals (not flip-flops)
- 2-6 pairs of socks
- 1 wedding appropriate dress/clothing
- Leggings
- 2-4 t-shirts/conservative tank tops (it is ok to show shoulders)
- 1 pair Knee-length bottoms/capris
- pullover or light sweater
- light, waterproof jacket and umbrella
- one-piece bathing suit (no bikinis!)
- underwear (one or two-week supply)
- medium-weight wool/polar fleece sweater (for cool nights)
- shower shoes
- 1 “workout” outfit (optional, could include sports bras, t-shirt/conservative shorts for jogging/sports)
- pajamas or similar sleepwear

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Three passport photos
- Yellow WHO Card (see the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document for more information)
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccine
- Three photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (*if applicable*)
- Note: pay close attention to permits documents

## HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- medication/prescriptions used regularly
- good quality thermometer for taking your temperature - important for those who have chronic health conditions and need to check their health status often. (Please note that the program has one that can be used during excursions or while at the office site)
- aspirin or other pain reliever, cold medication/decongestant
- anti-diarrheal medicine (e.g. Imodium)/laxatives
- eye drops and eyewash
- travel sickness medicine if you are prone to motion sickness
- sunscreen/Solarcaine spray and Aloe Vera
- band aids/antiseptic/antibacterial cream
- preferred ibuprofen brand
- preferred hair products
- Feminine products (can also be found in Kigali)
- Laxatives
- Tums
- deodorant, soap, and shampoo (for the whole semester or bring a small quantity and plan to buy more locally)
- mosquito repellent (two bottles)
- vitamin supplements (if you take them)
- hand wipes and/or antibacterial hand wash
- malaria prophylaxis (enough for the entire semester)
- allergy medicine (bring enough since you might not find them in local pharmacies)
- dental floss
- tissue
- mouthwash

## OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- water bottle
- student ID from your home college/university
- daypack or book/shoulder bag
- light raincoat—something that folds up small
- extra pair of glasses/contacts if you wear them
- contact solution (expensive in country)
- money belt large enough for passport
- homestay gifts (For day visits; please note that Rwandan adults don't like sweets)



- Umbrella

**To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19 students should come prepared with:**

- At least 3 reusable masks\* and gloves for personal protection (disposable masks will also be available)
- Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for use when soap and water is not readily available
- Anti-bacterial wipes or solution to wipe down high-touch surfaces, especially while traveling from the US

\*Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others. Masks help reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 both by close contact and by airborne transmission. Masks must have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Do not wear face shields alone (evaluation of the effectiveness of face shields is ongoing but is unknown at this time).

## OPTIONAL

- photos of your family, friends, and small portable book about your state (for day visits with homestay families)
- pocket sewing kit
- sunglasses, if you use them
- snacks
- lock and key
- Make up
- Ziploc bags (a few)
- Camera
- Mirror
- small sound recorder for practicum/ISP (if you think you may want to record things)
- granola bars/energy snacks
- powdered drinking mix
- flash drive
- converters/adapters
- pens (several) and notebooks that suit your writing needs and style