



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

& PACKING GUIDELINES

South Africa: Social Justice and Activism Internship
Summer 2024

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Over twenty-nine years into democracy, we find ourselves at an interesting moment to examine both the progress and challenges faced by South Africa. Large-scale war was averted, and a negotiation process brought about a peaceful transition to a democratic system, yet political and criminal violence remain a problem. Development policy aims to promote economic growth and social transformation, yet the rural-urban divide as well as inequality within the rural areas and urban centers continues. Discriminatory legal and institutional practices of the colonial and apartheid areas have been effectively challenged, and a new, progressive constitution put in place. Yet these rights are often at odds with cultural practices and the broader public opinion. South Africa now faces new challenges, including an education system in crisis, a Gini coefficient that is among the highest in the world and an overwhelmed public health care system, all which are placing considerable strain on the resources and the social fabric of society. The protection of human rights is enshrined in the Constitution – hailed as one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world – but these rights are challenged by poverty and inequality and further compromised by the nature and makeup of South Africa's multicultural society (manifested in terms of race, gender, language, ethnicity, religion, culture, and disability.) South Africa today provides a fertile environment for examining these dynamics and reflecting on questions about social justice and activism in post-apartheid era.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

South Africa extends 2000km (1242 miles) from the Limpopo River in the north to Cape Town in the south and 1500km (932 miles) from Port Nolloth in the west to Durban in the east. Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Swaziland run from west to east along South Africa's northern border and Lesotho is entirely contained within South Africa's borders. South Africa is the seventh largest African country, and it is twice the size of Texas. Its position just south of the Tropic of Capricorn makes South Africa a mostly dry and sunny place, but the climate is moderated by its topography and the surrounding oceans. The further east you go, the more useful your raingear becomes, but there are

also damp pockets in the southwest, particularly around Cape Town.

At 56 feet above sea level, Cape Town has a climate similar to that of California. The coast north from the Cape becomes progressively drier and hotter, culminating in the desert region just south of Namibia. Along the southern coast the weather is temperate, but due to the Agulhas current, the east coast becomes increasingly tropical the further north you go. In winter, it is moderately wet and we may see large cold fronts for limited periods. These bring significant rain and strong north-westerly winds. Students should have some rain gear and a warm jacket or sweater.

Cape Town: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
68/50	64/45	63/45	64/46

LOCAL CUSTOMS

South Africa is one of the most multiculturally diverse countries in the world. It has eleven official languages and as many different ethnic groups, particularly in urban areas. It is difficult to generalize on South African etiquettes and culture due to the diversity, however, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Cultural Dos

Be polite – Greet people when you meet them. Greetings are leisurely and include time for social discussion and exchanging pleasantries. Thank people when they do something for you and say goodbye when you or someone else leaves. **Clean up after yourself** – you are expected to clean after yourself in most places including in the classroom and rented rooms. **Be on time** to class and meetings. **Respect** others whatever their views and respect yourself. **Dress conservatively** – especially when meeting someone for the first time. **Gift giving is important** and wrapping your gifts show

extra effort. **Offer to help** and be prepared to receive offers of help.

Cultural Don'ts

Do not smell food at the dinner table. Do not smoke indoors. Do not bring alcohol into your accommodations, homestay, or internship site, or classroom. Do not use laptops in class without the permission of the lecturer. Do not take photographs of people without consent.

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 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.

Many traditional rituals involve food, and it is a sign of pride and generosity that even in the poorest houses there is always a meal waiting for the unexpected visitor. It would be considered rude to refuse food but SIT homestay parents are used to our students negotiating around quantities of food. Students enjoy the diet in South Africa, which may be in many ways not dissimilar to your own. However, it tends to include more starch and meat than you would normally be used to. The staple food is *pap*, made from ground up corn, but potatoes, rice and pasta will be equally as common. South Africa's main contribution to the world culinary repertoire is the *braai*, known in the U.S. as the barbeque, which is taken out at the first possible opportunity, and you will enjoy many of these during your time here.

South Africans enjoy their meat, but if you are not a meat eater do not worry. Our families are used to catering for vegetarian, vegan, and Kosher diets. The homestay coordinator will discuss your special needs with your family before you begin your

homestays and plan accordingly. Recognizing that meat plays a significant role in South African cultures, some students have decided to eat it on certain occasions. However, if this is not possible for you, you can still be flexible and supplement your diet as necessary.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends doing your own research to stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#). It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. SIT encourages students to have an informed discussion with your doctor and/or a travel clinician about what vaccines and other prophylactic medication you should receive.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health & wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country is very difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

Students should speak with their health care provider and/or a travel clinician and consult [CDC guidelines](#) regarding required and recommended immunizations and country regulations. Students participating on programs that require the yellow fever vaccine, will receive a signed and stamped "yellow card" after getting vaccinated, known as the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, which can be printed here). It is important to bring this card with you when traveling to the program. SIT recommends that students insert this document into their passport so that it is easily accessible when requested by immigration officials. Even if yellow fever is not a requirement for

your program, it is good practice to bring a copy of your immunization record with you, including your Covid 19 immunization card(s).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health Office](#).



HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single parent of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays.

These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

In this program, you will be staying in two homestays, the first you will be living with isiXhosa-speaking families in Langa Township in Cape Town. Langa is one of the oldest townships that emerged following the passage of the Urban Areas Act in 1923. Langa was a planned town and looks radically different from informal settlements that dot the Cape Town landscape. The term township refers to residential areas for black and coloured people. Langa is a vibrant community that values education and sports and has a strong Christian identity. Families typically consist of five to six members. The name Langa means “sun,” but it is derived from Langalibalele, a rebel chief imprisoned at Robben Island for rebelling against the government.

Your second homestay will be in Bo Kaap. Here you will be staying with coloured Afrikaans-speaking families (some of whom are descendants of slaves brought from Asia and the coastal Islands of East Africa). Most if not all the families will be practicing Muslims and you can expect your family to be fluent in English.

You will commute to your internship each day from Langa, and Bo Kaap and weekends are spent with the host family.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

You will also stay at backpackers’ lodges (known as hostels) during orientation and evaluation phases of the program, and for a few days between homestays.

TRANSPORTATION

For program related travel SIT will provide transportation that conforms to our COVID- 19 protocols. Other forms of private transport such as Uber and other variations of taxis are readily available.

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, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It is 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 the program staff and their homestay families.

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 always maintain a minimum amount of phone credits for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

We strongly recommend that you consider buying one in South Africa, as some US cell phones may not work in South Africa.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. Email is accessible during most of the time. The program does provide a certain amount of wireless access every month to

each student. If you need more Internet time, there are also Internet cafés with high-speed wireless access near the classroom if you prefer that option. When you are away from the classroom in Cape Town, email access is much more limited.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package 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 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, FedEx, UPS 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 is always a clever idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you regular mail, then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

C/o SIT Study Abroad
P.O. Box 45
Newlands, 7725
SOUTH AFRICA

Packages should be sent to the following address via **DHL, FedEx, or UPS:**

Student Name
c/o SIT Study Abroad
18 Station Road
Rondebosch
Cape Town 7700
South Africa

The mail service is good, though slow. A letter to or from the US usually takes from seven days to three weeks; postcards are slower. Make sure mail is **clearly marked AIR MAIL**. Packages often take longer and are expensive to send (either direction). There are a wide variety of courier services available in South Africa including DHL and FedEx. At current rates, you could send a package of up to

one pound for approximately US\$50 to arrive within two working days.

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. **Any other costs related to personal travel are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

The local currency is the South African rand. The exchange rate currently stands at R12 = US\$1. A money belt large enough to hold your passport and traveler's checks is useful. Upon arrival in Cape Town the SIT program will issue you a debit card. Your stipends for food and transport be paid into this card. You can access these funds account via ATMs or by charging the card.

If you choose to bring additional funds cash is more easily changed than travelers' checks. Should you bring travelers checks, Visa Travelers Checks are the best ones to bring, since they are more widely accepted, and changeable in the bank opposite our program center. MasterCard and/or Visa cards also work, and you can withdraw cash on most ATMs in Cape Town, arrangements must be made with your personal bank prior to travel.

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

If you intend to use a personal debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you do not 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 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 especially 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.

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

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US\$700 to \$1000**. 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.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$150-300
Books, printing, supplies:	\$100-150
Up-front medical costs:	\$200
Reciprocity Fee	\$100
Bottled Water:	\$50
Typical Internet café usage:	\$50-100
Estimated total of personal and other expenses:	\$650-900

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

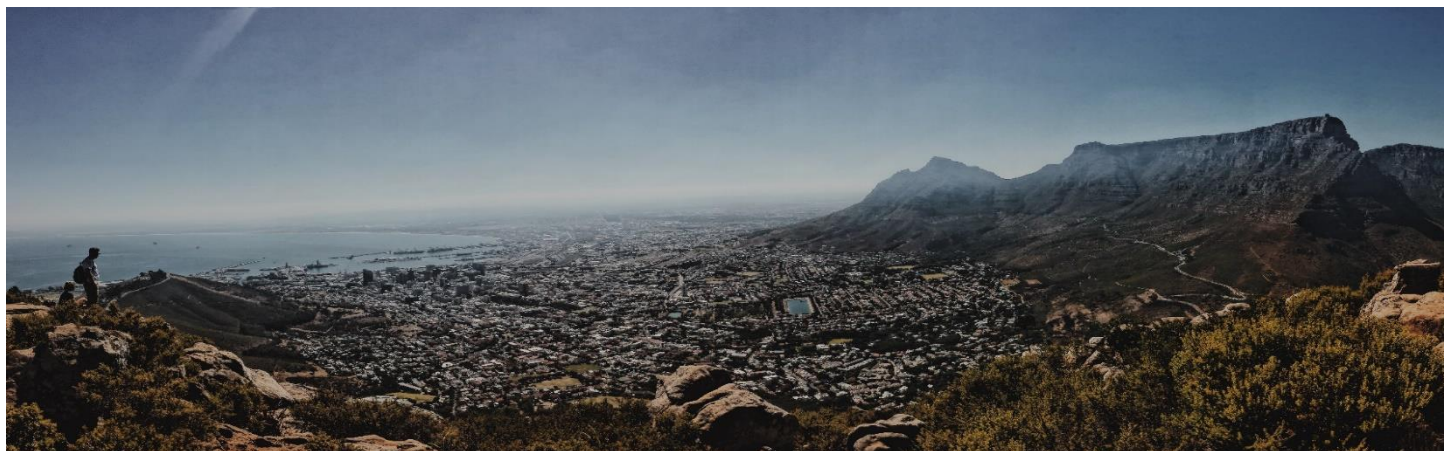
SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that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

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

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes, and the internship will be time-

consuming. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby 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 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.

Students are not permitted to leave South Africa at any time during the program. Opportunity for independent travel during the program is limited and cannot be guaranteed due to the rigorous schedule and disruption independent travel may cause to semester responsibilities. Requests to travel independently will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the academic director



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 be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We strongly recommend that students bring one big, wheeled duffel bag or a large backpack and a smaller bag. The smaller bag will help you to carry your luggage on shorter excursions. The checked luggage maximum weight should be **forty-six pounds** and carry-on weight should be **seventeen pounds**. Only one checked luggage will be allowed on flights inside South Africa.

If carrying prescription medications, it is recommended to carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit.

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

In general, dress in most parts of South Africa is like that of the U.S. You may need to dress more conservatively while in your homestay, depending on the family. Neat, conservative, comfortable clothes will help you to avoid the typical American tourist stereotype.

Cape Town winters (June-September) are wet and cold. Night temperatures tend to drop at higher elevations. Since the program will spend some time at high elevations, you will need a sweater, light coat or jacket, and waterproof rainwear. Due to the range of temperatures, we recommend bringing clothing that can be layered for warmth.

EQUIPMENT

Please bring at least one academic notebook with you, one to use for your academic field journal notes. This is in addition to any personal journals you may wish to keep for this semester. Students do not need a water purifier.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is strongly recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your private 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.

The SIT classroom has a wireless internet connection which is intended for academic research and email purposes only. There are several Internet cafés in the immediate area to facilitate use of sites such as Facebook.

Students store their computers at the program office while on excursion. Most US laptops require only a plug adapter but no voltage converter; it is your responsibility to confirm this for your own laptop.

Students who do not bring their own laptop computers will have access to computers through internet cafes. Internet cafes are widely available, but the costs can add up as students are required to type all assignments. Internet cafes charge about US\$2 per hour. It is possible to rent laptops or purchase used laptops in country. Students that have had their computers broken have received good repair service at nearby computer shops.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage, and electrical adapters.

<https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets/>

The standard voltage in South Africa is 220/230volts AC.

iPods and other music players are great for whiling away the hours in the buses and you can add South African music to your collection. A USB flash drive is essential for getting electronic reading material, copies of lecturer's PowerPoint presentations, and great for storing the pictures you cannot download to web-based storage.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

If you find you need some new clothing, you can buy virtually anything in S.A. at reasonable prices. If you do not already have other items, these can be obtained in South Africa as well. Prices for most items are reasonable. Many of the items you find in the U.S. are available in South Africa from local manufacturers. Toiletries and personal care items can also be purchased in S.A. at similar prices to the U.S. However, if you require any form of medication, bring a sufficient supply to last the duration of the program, as prescription drugs may not be mailed into South Africa. Remember to bring a spare pair of glasses or contact lenses if you wear them. You will be able to do laundry about once a week during the program, an average load, wash and dry, costs about US \$6.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

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/>.

PACKING LIST

CLOTHING

- Underwear – 7 day supply
- Socks - 4-7 pairs
- Four casual t-shirts
- Four pairs of skirts, shorts (at least mid-thigh length), lightweight slacks or pants
- Two pairs of jeans
- Four pairs of “dressier” shirts, blouses, or tops
- One set of clothes suitable for a night out or a more formal occasion
- 1 “workout” outfit (1-2 sports bras, t-shirts, conservative shorts, leggings)
- Winter pajamas
- One pair **comfortable** everyday shoes or sneakers
- One pair more formal shoe
- One pair of flip-flops and/or sandals
- Sweater, light coat, or jacket
- Waterproof rainwear
- Bathing suit (modern fashions are acceptable)
- Rain poncho or fold-up umbrella
- One sun hat

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card/International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis recommended
- Two photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (*if applicable*)
- Two passport photos
- Proof of COVID-19 vaccine/booster encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

Bring a full supply of any medications needed for the duration of your program including regular prescriptions as well as preventative medications such as antimalarial prophylaxis, altitude sickness prophylaxis, antidiarrheal medication, etc. if applicable for your location(s) of travel.

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Towel and a washcloth
- Flashlight (with small extra bulb and extra batteries)
- Sports bag and a small daypack

- Decent quality, small locks (for luggage and locker)
- Gifts for homestay families and others
- Alarm clock (non-electric, portable, with spare batteries)
- Photos of your family & friends & small portable book about your State
- Academic Journals (see above, “Equipment”)
- Flash cards
- Student ID or if possible International Student ID (for discounts)

OPTIONAL

- Camera
- Sunglasses
- An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses, if worn
- Pocket sewing kit