

Cameroon: Development and Social Change

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2025

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Cameroon is home to over 250 ethnic and language groups and is often referred to as “Africa in Miniature” because of its diversity. Cameroon’s official languages are French and English, a product of a partition after World War I that resulted in Cameroon being split between the French and the English. French Cameroon gained its independence in 1960 and a year later, English-speaking Cameroon merged with it to form present-day Cameroon.

Since its independence, Cameroon has gone from a federal state to a highly centralized unitary presidential republic and then to a democratic state. A president, assisted by a prime minister, heads the executive branch of the government, and there is a judiciary and legislative branch closely tied to the executive power. Cameroon has had two presidents since independence: Amadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya. Several political parties exist in the country and are represented in parliament, but the Cameroon People’s Democratic Party (CPDM) is the most dominant entity.

The country has long been among the few peaceful states in the central part of the African continent. The president of Cameroon strives to preserve peace in the country and in 2008 succeeded in calming down a transportation strike joined by many Cameroonians requesting a change in power and a better economic life. The current political climate is dominated by the government’s efforts to improve Cameroonians’ quality of life and reduce corruption. Security forces are preserving peace.



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For most of the 20th century, the economy of Cameroon was based on agriculture, but it has gradually shifted towards mining and industrialization. The drop in commodity prices for its principal exports – oil, cocoa, coffee, and cotton – in the mid-1980s, combined with an overvalued currency and economic mismanagement, led to a severe economic crisis. This resulted in the 1994 devaluation of the local currency which, contrary to expectations, worsened the living conditions of Cameroonians. To help improve the situation, the World Bank, the IMF, and the government have implemented several economic reform programs.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Cameroon has mountains, volcanic highlands, coastal plains, jungles, rivers, rain forests, and savanna. This very diverse topography also has distinct climates. The coast has high temperatures and humidity throughout the year, and one point on Mt. Cameroon has the second-highest rainfall – 1,150 cm. (460 in.) – in the world.

The Northwest has high altitudes and cool weather. In Yaoundé, where the program is based, the climate is quite pleasant – warm to hot in the daytime and comfortable in the evenings. Please note, however, that temperatures during excursion in the western province can become very chilly (in the 50s), especially during the rainy season. The rainy season is from March to November, and the dry season is from November to March. It follows that there is dust in the dry season and mud in the rainy season.

West Province: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)				
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
85/67	85/67	85/67	85/66	83/67
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
81/66	81/65	83/66	83/66	

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Below are some cultural dos and don'ts to respect in Cameroon, but it is important to keep in mind that the list is incomplete and only presents some of the most common occurrences.

In some areas of Cameroon, most gatherings, whether social or work-related, will begin with prayer. Greetings are very important in the culture. Elders are respected and not called by their given names. Familial words such as maman, mommy, pa, petit frère, tonton, tata, etc. are used to show respect. Handshaking is a normal greeting, but not everyone will. Avoid giving or accepting things using the left hand. Most Cameroonians will not make eye contact when talking to you. Doing this to an elder would be considered disrespectful. Crossing legs is a sign of superiority and therefore not respectful.

People dress up to go out in public – better late than dirty! Being late is acceptable. In fact, expect it! Carry something to occupy your mind when waiting. Be very, very, very patient. Cameroonians have

been doing the same things in the same way for many generations. Don't expect to change the entire society. Privacy and anonymity are scarce in this culture, so be prepared to give up some personal space.

IDENTITY

SIT creates an inclusive and safe space on our programs for students of all identities, your experience in various cultural contexts beyond SIT spaces may be influenced by how certain identities are perceived locally. We encourage students to do research and utilize resources available to you to better prepare yourself for your experience abroad. Visit our [Identity Abroad](#) page for resources on how to get started.

In general, Cameroonians are very friendly and will make their intentions known if they are interested in a romantic relationship. People in relationship would not be affectionate in public as it might be seen by some as being disrespectful. We encourage students to reach out to the staff if they are uncertain on how to navigate relationships.



Because Cameroon is a patriarchal society, the older women turn to be modest in their dressing while the younger generation turn to be less modest following trends on social media. Regarding house chores, the women are more involved with the cooking, taking care of children, shopping and doing the laundry. The men do way less, spending a lot of time watching soccer.

DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Meals in Cameroon usually consist of a starchy staple such as rice, yam, couscous, or plantains and a sauce. Popular sauces include green leaf, okra, and tomato cooked with some meat or fish in palm oil. The amount and size of the protein put in the sauces are usually small amounts. Maintaining a vegetarian diet can be somewhat challenging in Cameroon and very few family will have cheese as part of their meals. During group activities and excursions, the program will make an effort to have vegetarian options available; however, this may not always be possible. Vegetarian meals are rare, meaning that it will be difficult to remain a strict vegetarian in Cameroon. If you are less strict, then it is recommended that you reacquaint your body with meat or fish before you arrive in country. We do ask hosts families and caterers

to help provide vegetarian meals, but you should understand that the concept of vegetarianism is not yet popular. With this in mind, the flexible vegetarian should be able to manage in Cameroon.

Here are a few suggestions regarding food. People might be offended if you refuse their food or drinks during a visit. Smelling the food before eating is not generally done. We recommend that you do not waste food, if you are served a lot of food asked for an extra plate to cut out what you can eat. Say *bon appetit* or simply *appetit* before you begin eating and when it is said to you, reply with *merci* or *thank you*.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

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

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](#) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](#) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](#) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on 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. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#). 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, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

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 mother 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: in order 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.** We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.

On this program, you will be staying in TWO homestays. You will stay with a Cameroonian family, in Yaoundé and in Batoufam. Classes will be held both at the program center in Bastos and in conference rooms when we are on excursions. When in Yaoundé, and Batoufam, your homestay will provide two meals, and you will receive a stipend for lunch. When on excursion, the program staff will provide all three meals.

In Yaounde, you will each have your own room at your homestay. Most families in Yaounde do not have wifi in their houses, so we encourage students to get a sim card in Cameroon on arrival so they can use a hot spot when required. The weather in Yaounde is hot during the day but gets cold in the evenings, so most houses do not have air conditioning. A fan should be more than enough when it gets hot in the day. You will be expected to take bucket showers in some homes, however, almost all the houses have modern toilets. In addition, not all homestays have a washing machine, so you might be required to wash your clothes by hand or give them out to be washed.

In Batoufam, students still have their own rooms, however, because this is a rural area not all rooms have a tarred floor. In homestay where the father has many wives, you will have a room in the father's own house. The network is good, however, almost no homestay has wifi. Students have bucket showers and in some cases they might be required to use squat toilets. The weather in Batoufam is cold and fresh but in the fall semester it can be quite muddy because of the rains. In general, the people are very warm and welcoming in Batoufam.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions.

During orientation and some excursions, you will be housed in hostels that have been approved by your Academic Director. These hostels are expected to meet basic standards for hygiene and service but you should not expect U.S. hotel standards here. You will arrange your own accommodations during the ISP/internship period with the approval of the Academic Director and the aid of the local staff. Hostels and local inns are not available options during your ISP/internship.

TRANSPORTATION

In Yaoundé, most Cameroonians get around by using taxis. You will make your way to and from class on your own. Walking is the best option, but you can also use taxis. Use of motorbike taxis is prohibited. During excursions, we will use cars rented by the program or we may walk.

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. Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

[Cell Phone Policy](#)

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

Most students purchase a cell phone upon arrival in Cameroon. They cost between US\$50 and US\$100. If you already have a GSM phone, you might be able to just change the SIM card while you are here, but it may be more cost-effective to purchase a local cell phone. Cell phones function on a pay-as-you-go basis. You recharge the phone when you want and get charged only when you place a call, never when you receive one. You can also buy internet data via your phone and share internet on your computer. During the fall semester, the time difference between Cameroon and the U.S. (East Coast) is six hours. In the spring, it decreases to five hours.

There are a couple of computers at the program office that you can use during work hours, but usage is restricted to word processing. Internet access is available in the office for academic research only; we do not encourage students to use the Internet in the office as it reduces their experience of community services.

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. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

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's always a good 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 mail then posted letters should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
c/o The School for International Training
BP 33241
Yaoundé, Cameroon

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

Student Name
Telephone number of student)
c/o The School for International Training
BP 33241
Yaoundé, Cameroon

Please note that SIT is updating lease agreements. This address is subject to change.

DHL or other private carriers may need a residential street address. Please call the student affairs office at 802-258-3212 for specific address information if this is the case.

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 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 are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

Cameroon's currency is known as the Franc CFA (pronounced Céfa), which is also used by five other countries in Central Africa and eight countries in West Africa. Although the Central African CFA has the same value as the West African CFA, the two are not interchangeable. The Central African CFA can only be used in the Central African countries in the CFA zone and vice versa. Please bring your money in various forms such as cash and debit and/or credit cards for emergencies. This is so that if there is a problem with one option you will still have access to money. You can take out up to US\$300 at a time with VISA cards only. You must have your PIN in order to use a debit card or take out a cash advance. While it is easy to take out cash at a bank with your credit card/debit card/ATM card, credit cards are not accepted as payment in most parts of Cameroon. Cash is used for most daily transactions and the use of checks, traveler's checks, and credit/debit cards for direct purchases is rare.

Some students also have their parents send them money via Western Union. It is very easy, reliable, and fast, and there are various Western Union locations throughout Cameroon. You can easily exchange Euros and U.S. dollars. A money belt large enough to hold your passport is useful. The Academic Director will allow you to keep some of your money in the safe in the office if you want; you will need to arrange that with her when you arrive. Bring many numerical locks and at least a bag whose contents cannot be accessed when locked.

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

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.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP/Internship-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

A suggested total amount of personal spending money to budget ranges from 1,550-1600 USD. 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 or a specific personal expense.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	500 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	100 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Potential ISP travel expenses:	100 USD
Internet key and phone:	200 USD
Tourist sites:	100 USD
Miscellaneous:	50-100
Estimated total:	1,550-1600 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

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 visitors. See the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. 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.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

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. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

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

The clothes that you bring should all be washable and breathable and preferably drip-dry cotton and cotton-blends. Do not bring sloppy clothes or clothes with immodest pictures or writing on them. Revealing clothing and very informal clothing, such as tank tops, are not acceptable. Dark-colored clothing is preferred because of dust or mud. All clothing should be modest: tops should cover shoulders and waists (no tank tops, crop tops, or bikinis); skirts and shorts should be at knee level or below knees; clothing should not be see-through; and plunging necklines are not acceptable.

Night temperatures tend to drop at higher elevations. Therefore, you will need a sweater, light coat or jacket, and waterproof rainwear. Remember, you have to hand-wash everything; key words to keep in mind when selecting clothing are clean, neat, in good condition, presentable, comfortable, and conservative. Plan on a combination of casual and somewhat dressy (one or two items). You will spend most of your time in cosmopolitan Yaoundé – don't be afraid to look nice. Most students get a lot of local clothing made for them while they are in Cameroon.

Buy all the items in the packing list in the U.S. It is usually cheaper, more easily available, and of better quality. Remember, you can have clothes made with local fabric in Cameroon and most students usually take advantage of this. In addition to being a sign of integration, clothes are cheap and pretty. Please buy formal shoes; wearing flip flops out of the house is not respectful, and students are not allowed to come to class in flip flops. Sandals with straps at the back can be worn and are accepted anywhere.

Dressing could be more formal depending on the places or ceremonies you go to, or less formal if staying at home.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is 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, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.
<http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

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 as a means 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.

Some suggestions are: flashlights, music in the form of CDs or DVDs, lipstick or nail polish, perfumes, glow in the dark stars, T-shirts with logos, shirts, purses, baseball hats with logos, small photo albums with pictures of your family/state and some blank pages in which to insert pictures you might take with your homestay families, and a book with pictures of your state or the U.S. in general.

For kids: small toys and games, stickers, inexpensive watercolors, crayons, coloring books, or other school supplies (interesting products, book bags, pencils, pens), T-shirts with logos; fairly simple novels or children's books (in English), dictionaries, and candy or other American edibles. As a general rule, bring a wide range of gifts for a wide range of ages, because you will not know the age of your family members ahead of time. You will have different homestay families, and they tend to be very different experiences.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

You can generally obtain most of these items in the larger cities but usually at a higher price. Additionally, you will not always be in the places where you can get these items, and specific brands may not be available. Remember that you will be responsible for doing your own laundry, which is commonly done by hand in Cameroon. Washing machines or laundromats are not commonly available.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>. Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!



Packing List

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

Packing list sample:

GENERAL

- 2 pairs of jeans
- 3-5 pairs of lightweight pants or skirts
- 4-6 shirts or light blouses
- Bathing suit and 2 travel towels
- Sweater or Jacket
- 1-2 long sleeve shirts to wear with your sweater or jacket when it is cool
- 2 dressy outfits, for meetings and interviews
- Light raincoat
- 1 pair of nice shoes, tennis shoes and walking sandals (Not flip-flops), 1 pair of flip-flops for showers
- Underwear (2-3 week supply)
- Dark colored socks

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card/International Certificate of Prophylaxis (see the [Safety, Security, Health](#) document for more information)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- COVID-19 vaccination card encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Over-the-counter medications as approved by your doctor
- Small first aid kit
- Sunscreen/solarcaine spray (sunscreen is not widely available)
- Mosquito repellent w/ 20-30% DEET for use on skin and up to 100% DEET (permethrin) for use on clothing
- Water disinfectant tablets (1 bottle) or iodine, for travel in rural areas where bottled water is not available
- Malaria prophylaxis – bring enough for the entire semester! Please consult your physician for the number of pills needed and the type of malaria prophylaxis that is best for you.
- Tampons or sanitary napkins (consider bringing enough for the entire semester; they are available, but not in all sizes/types and they are expensive)
- Hand sanitizer

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Numerical locks for your bags
- Laptop/computer
- Sturdy folding umbrella (especially fall semester)
- Mosquito net (the kind that is freestanding with an internal frame is highly recommended; if you have trouble finding one, Travel Medicine, Inc., Long Road, and REI have several good models)
- Flashlight (small with extra bulb)
- Extra batteries for all electronic items
- French/English dictionary (small)
- LifeStraw Go Water Bottle with Integrated 1000-Liter LifeStraw Filter
- Money belt
- Flash drive
- Digital recorder
- Headlamp
- Raincoat (waterproof)