

Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the Middle East

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2025

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a small country (population: 10.1 million) with few natural resources, but it has played a pivotal role in the struggle for power in the Middle East. Jordan's significance results partly from its strategic location at the crossroads of what most Christians, Jews, and Muslims call the Holy Land. The desert kingdom emerged out of the post-World War I division of the Middle East by Britain and France. The population at that time was made up largely of Bedouin tribesmen, known as East Bank Jordanians, who were followers of King Hussein's grandfather, Abdullah, himself originally from Arabia. Today, a significant portion of the population of Jordan is of Palestinian origin—that is, from areas west of the River Jordan, including the West Bank, today's Israel, and Gaza. With the exception of persons from Gaza, the vast majority of those persons of Palestinian origin have Jordanian citizenship. Arabs comprise 98% of the population of Jordan, with the remaining 2% being Circassian and Armenian. As such, Arabic is the official and predominant language in the country with English widely understood among upper and middle classes. Jordanian society is characterized by religious tolerance, where Sunni Muslims represent 94% of the population and the other 6% are Christian.

The country's long-time ruler was King Hussein (1953-99). A pragmatic leader, he successfully navigated competing pressures from the major powers (US, USSR, and UK), various Arab states, Israel, and a large internal Palestinian population, despite several wars and coup attempts. In 1989 he reinstituted parliamentary elections and gradual political liberalization; in 1994 he signed a peace treaty with Israel. His son, King Abdullah II, assumed the throne following his father's death in February 1999. Since then, he has consolidated his power and undertaken an aggressive economic and political reform program. Jordan acceded to the World Trade Organization in 2000 and began to participate in the

European Free Trade Association in 2001. After a two-year delay, parliamentary and municipal elections took place in the summer of 2003.

Unlike many of the states in the region, Jordan has no oil of its own. Its resources are limited to phosphates and agricultural produce. The economy depends largely on services, tourism, and foreign aid, for which the US is the main provider. Jordan prides itself on its health service, one of the best in the region.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Jordan is a relatively small country situated at the junction of the Levantine and Arabian areas of the Middle East. The country is bordered on the north by Syria, to the east by Iraq, and by Saudi Arabia on the east and south. To the west are Israel and the occupied West Bank, while Jordan's only outlet to the sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, is to the south. Western Jordan has essentially a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers. However, about 75% of the country can be described as having a desert climate with less than 200 mm of rain annually. Jordan can be divided into three main geographic and climatic areas: the Jordan Valley, the Mountain Heights Plateau, and the eastern desert, or Badia region.

Jordan is a very sunny country with average daily sunshine hours ranging from as much as twelve to thirteen hours a day in summer. Although summer temperatures are high in the desert, the heat is usually moderated by low humidity and a stiff breeze during the day, and the nights are cool and pleasant.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

In Jordan, shaking hands is the common greeting between men and women. However, men should wait for an Arab woman to offer her hand and women should similarly wait for an Arab man to offer his hand. Many women prefer to avoid touching a man they do not know well. Many men and women avoid touching a woman at all if she is not related to them, and in that case they may gesture by holding their hand toward their chests. People stand up when greeting each other. People usually say *Alhamdulillah*

Amman, Jordan: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
54/39	56/40	60/43	73/49	85/57

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
88/62	81/57	70/50	59/42

to respond to "How are you?" (*Alhamdulillah* means "Thank God") even if they are not well. It's a religious concept, which reveals the idea of thanking God.

In many households, people take off their shoes when entering, so we recommend that you bring slip-on shoes or sandals. If you are invited for a meal, everybody may eat from a common plate (this may be less common due to Covid-19 however); take the food immediately opposite to you only. Somebody will continue offering you food; eat what you can. It is very important to accept Arabic coffee when it is offered to the guest by Jordanians, as it is a cultural symbol of hospitality and should be accepted as an act of goodwill.

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 Jordan, while the society is generally conservative, it is also known for its hospitality and respect for different identities, religions, and ethnicities. People from diverse backgrounds, including those who identify as BIPOC and religious minorities, are usually treated with respect and courtesy. The country prides itself on its peaceful coexistence of different religious groups, where there is a strong tradition of interfaith harmony. However, modesty in dress and behavior is generally expected, and being mindful of local customs can enhance your experience.

For individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, Jordan presents some challenges. While not illegal, LGBTQIA+ identities are not openly discussed or widely accepted in public discourse. It is advised to be mindful about sharing one's sexual or gender identity with people you do not know well, as these topics are not commonly discussed in public and may not be fully understood by everyone. There are few resources locally for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and discretion is recommended. Overall, understanding and respecting local cultural norms is key to navigating Jordan's societal landscape safely and respectfully.

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.

As in most cultures, food and rituals surrounding shared meals is quite central in Jordan. Families generally eat a good breakfast (this often includes fresh-baked bread, hummus, cheese, olives, and *zeit wa za'tar* (olive oil and thyme), a heavy late lunch around 3 pm (variably this includes cooked lamb, chicken, rice, and a variety of vegetables), and a lighter dinner late at night (similar to breakfast, sometimes containing leftovers from lunch). Like all Arabs, Jordanians think of food sharing as a bonding experience, and so the guests are always pressed over and over to eat more, a situation that makes many students uncomfortable (tip: eat at a slower pace than you usually do, and when full, say *alhamdu-li-lah*, and thank your host every time he/she presses you to eat more).

Vegetarian or vegan diets are rarely followed in Jordan, but people are becoming increasingly aware of the choice, especially in the cities. Luckily, the fact that Levantine food is rich in vegetable-only dishes (such as *fuul*, *hummus*, *tabbouleh*, and *falafel*) makes it easier for Jordanian families and restaurants to accommodate vegetarian or vegan diets. Kosher meats are not available in Jordan, though other foods that fit into Jewish dietary requirements are easily found. If you have inflexible dietary requirements, please let your admissions counselor know as soon as possible so that we might try to find a homestay that can accommodate your needs. If this is not possible, you can discuss other program options that might better meet your needs with your admissions counselor.

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.

During this program, you will be staying with a host family in a single room. While you will have your own private space, you may share a bathroom with the family, though some homes may provide a separate toilet or bathroom for you. Most homestays offer good ventilation, and your room will have either a fan or heater depending on the season, but air conditioning is typically not available. While many families do have Wi-Fi, it may not be guaranteed in all homes. This setup offers a comfortable and authentic experience, but it’s important to be flexible and open to local living conditions.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

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

| During the ISP and internship period, students will continue staying with their host families, maintaining a comfortable and familiar environment. During program excursions, students will share rooms with one another, typically staying in three- or four-star hotels or in camps, depending on the location. These accommodations are clean, safe, and offer essential amenities. It's important to be prepared for a range of accommodation and maintain flexibility, as some locations may offer more basic setups while still providing a rewarding experience. |

TRANSPORTATION

| In Jordan, students will primarily use taxis to commute around the city, as they are readily available at reasonable rates. SIT provides a transportation stipend as part of your weekly allowance to cover travel to and from the SIT headquarters. It's important to plan for peak traffic, especially in the mornings, so allow extra time to avoid being late. In addition to taxis, apps like Uber and Careem are also available for convenience. During program excursions, the group will travel together by bus. Expect transportation to be generally accessible and affordable throughout your stay. |

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.

Mobile phones are an essential feature of social and cultural life in Jordan, and rates are relatively inexpensive. Your AD will take you during the first day of orientation to the offices of Zain, Orange, or Umniah, major carriers in Jordan, to purchase your local smart phone or local sim card. The initial cost ranges from 40-50 JD (approximately US \$60-75), for a local smart phone and there is no need to sign a long-term service agreement. Local sim cards cost approximately 11 JD (US \$15.50), and for 7 JD (US \$10) per month you will get 1000 minutes and 3GB of internet. Keeping your phone adequately full of credit will cost approximately US \$40 per semester.

You can use your phone as much or little as you like, adding minutes to your account by purchasing “scratch cards” from any mobile phone store in the country—and there seem to be thousands! It doesn’t cost you anything to receive calls, even from overseas, which makes a mobile phone the most convenient way for loved ones to stay in touch with you during your stay. Remember, Jordan’s time zone is +2 GMT while the Eastern US is -5 GMT.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. SIT Jordan has Fiber service with wireless for its offices, and students can use the wireless between and after classes but not during class sessions. If your laptop is capable of connecting to wireless networks, then you will be able to access the Internet there. Internet cafes are widely available, with rates averaging US \$ 1.50 per hour. You can also buy an internet USB where you can use the internet anywhere; this will cost about \$40 per month.

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 and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
[P.O. Box 840062
Amman 11181, Jordan]

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

Student Name
[30 Blodan Street, Abdoun
Amman, Jordan]

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.

The currency in Jordan is the Jordanian Dinar (1JD=1.41USD). Each *dinar* has 100 piasters (Arabic: *girsh*, plural: *groosh*). The dinar comes in notes of 5, 10, 20, and 50 JD. The easiest way to get money in Jordan is with a bank debit card. ATM machines are widely available. This method also has the advantage of giving you the wholesale exchange rate, which is slightly better than the retail rate that you'll get at currency exchange shops. Credit cards are used often in Amman, so a Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit card can be used to make purchases around town, but mostly at the malls and major retailers

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 \$2060 - 2210. 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)	\$1,000
Books, printing, supplies:	\$200 – 300
Up-front medical costs: (any medical costs will get)	\$500
Visa:	\$60
Possible ISP travel costs:	\$150
Cell phone:	\$150 – \$200
Estimated total:	\$2060 – 2,210

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

For the warmer season (April to October), you need wash-and-wear summer clothes. During the cooler season (November – March), it can get very cold, especially in the evenings. It will feel much colder than the temperature would suggest, especially inland or in the mountains. Bring warm, comfortable clothes you can wear at home during this season. Plan to dress in layers—as it gets warmer or colder, you can simply eliminate or add layers.

Jordanians dress more formally than Americans, and there are cultural rules concerning dress, especially for women. It is better to dress conservatively rather than not conservatively enough. Long-sleeved blouses and shirts and skirts that fall below the knee are appropriate; pants are also common attire for Jordanian women. Long sweaters for women are usually helpful; people tend to choose darker colors for the winter. Clothes should not be tight or see-through. (No mini-skirts, tank tops, or short shorts.) Jordan is extremely formal, so bring one dressy outfit. Amman is very sunny most of the year, so bring a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Don't forget a heavy sweater and a bathing suit (you may feel more comfortable if you forego the bikini).

EQUIPMENT

No extra equipment is necessary, everything will be taken care of by your host families. Mosquitoes are not a problem in Jordan, so there is no need to bring a mosquito net.

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.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Bring enough deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, etc. for the first two weeks or so. US toiletries are readily available. After the first week, students will move in with their host families, and family members will wash or help the students wash their clothes

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

- 1 nice outfit (conservative dress/skirt, nice shirt/neat pants)
- 1-2 pair casual but neat pants
- 1 pair nice pants
- 1-2 pair jeans
- Long-sleeve cotton shirts or blouses and a few T-shirts
- 2 light sweaters
- Exercise/sports clothes (optional, depending on your interests)
- Swimsuit
- Underwear (one- to two-week supply)
- Socks (one-week supply)
- Hat and sunglasses (the desert sun will be bright)
- A warm winter coat (Amman's hilly location brings sharp winds during cold winters-and even the occasional snow)
- 1 pair comfortable everyday shoes that are fairly dressy and good for walking. Your shoes should be sturdy. Bring an extra pair if you have large feet, because larger sizes are difficult or impossible to find.
- 1 pair sandals for outdoors (Teva or Chacos are great)
- 1 pair sneakers and/or 1 pair light hiking boots
- 1 pair of house slippers
- Scarf (large enough to cover hair: for visiting mosques, churches, and other holy places)
- 2 long cotton skirts

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- 2 passport photos
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination encouraged]

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit (most supplies can be bought here)

- Extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Sunglasses
- Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap (for sun protection) |

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Money belt
- Small tape or digital recorder (optional for field work interviews)
- School supplies, notebook, journal, pens (to get you started during orientation)
- Book bag or small backpack for school use
- Small bath towel
- Small flashlight
- Photos of friends/family from home to share with homestay family
- Water bottle (dehydration is an important health concern in the desert)
 - Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
 - Small, quick-drying towel
 - Flashlight
 - Reusable water bottle
 - Small luggage lock
 - Laptop computer (*please insure it*)