

Kenya: Global Health and Human Rights

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Fall 2026

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kisumu, your program base, is the third largest city in Kenya, after Nairobi and Mombasa. The Luo are the major ethnic group in Kisumu with a large population of Kenyans of Indian origin. English and Kiswahili are widely spoken especially in the metropolis. Like most cities, Kisumu has various social and economic amenities including malls, banks, ATMs, indigenous and foreign restaurants.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Kisumu lies astride the equator. The main rainy season typically occurs April - May with a second, lesser one in October - November. Kisumu and the coastal and lake areas are hot and humid most of the time.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Local customs will be explained in greater detail during orientation and throughout the semester, but here are a few to get you started:

- In Kisumu, people greet each other before beginning their conversation. The standard greeting is “*Hujambo?*” and the response is “*Sijambo.*” It is polite to shake hands.
- Respect is the foundation of Kenyan social interactions. Younger people are expected to defer to elders and women are expected to appear humble.
- Left-handedness is gaining acceptance, but it is still best to give and receive objects with the right hand.
- When invited for a meal in a local person’s house, we recommend you eat with your right hand and always wash your hands before starting.
- It is polite to try all the different foods, but you do not necessarily have to eat them if you don’t like them. You can politely explain that the taste is new to you, and you are not used to it yet.
- Food is often shared with other relatives or neighbors and should not be wasted. However, do not be shy to ask your host for seconds.
- When living with a local person, follow his/her lead in deciding where and when to go out at night.

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- A typical household in Kisumu has between three and five people.

LOCAL 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.

The main staple of Kisumu is ugali, a stiff porridge that is eaten, together with a sauce, at most meals. Fresh tropical fruits and vegetables are plentiful and relatively cheap, so following a vegetarian diet is not too difficult. Veganism, depending on the type of vegan commitment, is difficult but can be upheld. Rice, fish or meat curry, green vegetables (kales, collards, *mchicha*), beans, and millet are also popular staple foods.

If in a homestay:

Your breakfast and dinners will be provided by your homestay family. However, SIT adheres to local norms and practices and students will be prepared to conform to homestay family norms and practices around food and food etiquette. You should expect to eat the food that the family usually prepares for themselves. Meals are usually served between 7:00pm and 9:00pm.

If in independent housing:

Students prepare their meals in the apartment provided kitchen or purchase their meals at local restaurants and eateries. Students will be equipped with knowledge and skills for living sustainably or on budget, including where to obtain safe, healthy and affordable food. all their One paragraph. Please include information on where food can be purchased, if accommodation will have a kitchen, etc.

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.

MEAL PLANNING

Homestay families generally provide breakfast and dinner during the week and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the weekend. This is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy traditional meals and immerse yourself in the local culture.

Residential students are responsible for the majority of their meals and should plan accordingly. Meal planning becomes an exciting way to explore local markets, try new ingredients, and even cook with fellow students.

The estimated cost for meals not provided during the program is based on the cost of modestly eating out or buying groceries to prepare your own meals, when cooking facilities are available. If you plan on

eating out regularly, you should budget more money. Exploring local food is one of the highlights of living abroad, so give yourself room to savor the experience.

Please remember to budget at least (\$520 if you choose a homestay, \$1600 if you choose residential housing) for your meals not provided during the semester. For a breakdown of your program's estimated out-of-pocket expenses, please see the table in the **Money** section of this document.

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](#).

HOUSING

The housing fee covers accommodations during the entire program period. This includes during orientation, homestays or independent accommodations while at the program base, on all excursions, and during the evaluation period.

This program offers the option of choosing either a homestay or independent housing.

Homestay

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 homestays or independent housing for 55 days, with a long excursion in between

All students staying in homestay will have their own room. Bathrooms, living rooms and kitchens are typically shared spaces. Fans may be used in place of air conditioning. Showers are a common feature among homestays in the Milimani area, where homestays are based.

Independent Housing

Students will be placed in two or three bedroomed apartments all located in the Milimani, where the program center is also located. Each student has their own room, with shared living room and kitchen. Each apartment comes with a housekeeper, limited utilities, and some cooking utensils.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

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

Students will stay in homestays, hotels, campsites and apartments. All ISP/Internship sites must be based within Kisumu County.

TRANSPORTATION

In Kisumu, you will either walk to and from homestay/apartment or use public transportation such as “*tuk tuk*,” a three-wheeled vehicle with an enclosed area for passengers.

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. *WhatsApp is a widely used mode of both formal and informal communication*

The SIT program center provides internet access until the start of ISP/Internship period. 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 and 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
[SIT Kenya: Global Health and Human Rights
C/O Miltone Omondi
SIT Study Abroad/ World Learning
Post Office Box 7286 – 40100
Adala Otuko Road
Milimani, Kenya
+254721989281

MONEY

Cash (particularly in US\$50 and US\$100 denominations) gets a better rate. Make sure any cash you bring is in bills issued after the year 2017, as many places in East Africa will not accept older bills. Cash is used for most daily transactions as are credit/debit cards for direct purchases.

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.

We suggest that you budget between US\$1700 to \$2800 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. 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 carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are meals not provided by the program, textbooks, Independent Study Project or Internship-related expenses not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	400 USD
Meals Not Provided	520 USD (homestay), 1600 USD (housing)
Books, printing, supplies:	100 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Visa:	100 USD
Phone airtime & Internet bundles:	100 USD
Estimated total:	1,720 USD (homestay)– 2,800 USD (housing)

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

Casual dress can include jeans, sneakers, and occasionally T-shirts, as long as they are clean and free of holes. More formal occasions (of which there will be several) call for neat, pressed, dark colored slacks, pressed, button-up shirts (long or short sleeve), and leather dress shoes (penny loafers or lace-ups) or dress sandals. Flamboyantly colorful, Hawaiian-style shirts or guayaberas can be worn semi-formally in Kenya, so long as they are clean and pressed, and have a collar and buttons. A variety of colorful slip-over shirts are available here. Kenyans consider shorts to be appropriate for schoolboys and playing sports, but not for casual wear by adult males. Shirts with sleeves, whether short or long, are required.

Ties and jackets are not required but it is a good idea to have one of each. Whatever you do not pack, you can probably get in Kenya.

EQUIPMENT

Mosquito nets are available in Kenya and cost about \$10 USD. You only need to bring a sleeping bag if you plan to camp on your own after the program. If you plan to climb the mountains or travel through cold countries, you will need a heavier bag. These are usually available in Nairobi either retail or secondhand but there is no guarantee that you will get the bag you want, at the time you need it.

The program provides bottled water during all excursions and clean bottled water can be purchased nearly everywhere in Kenya. Water bottles can be purchased in Kisumu, but you may also bring your own if you prefer a special kind.

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

If you are staying with a homestay family, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your 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

Items readily available in Kenya include soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tampons, pads, moisturizers, deodorant, most prescription medications, and some familiar over-the-counter medications. However, particular brands of certain toiletries may not be available. One example is deodorant; most brands available in the US are not available here.

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:

Clothing

- 1 waterproof raincoat and umbrella (poncho is recommended).
- 1 outfit for hiking/outdoorsy activities.
- 5-7 pairs of socks.
- 4-6 sports bras and 2 or 3 regular bras.
- Chacos/Texas/athletic sandals.
- 1 pair of sneakers or other casual good walking shoes.
- Hiking boots if you plan to hike, but sneakers are sufficient.

Travel items

- 1 Duffel bag that can fold for storage or
- 1-2 large, checked suitcase
- 1 Backpack
- 1 Carry-on size bag for trips
- 2 Towels.
- 1 Sim or non sim compatible phone.
- Water shoes for water activities on the coast (Optional)

Stationery

- Notebooks that fit in your day pack or fanny pack.
- Good pens that you like to write with.

Nutrition and health

- Travel size toiletries unless you care for brands.
- Snacks you are used to, e.g. good granola bars.
- Protein bars.
- At least 3 bottles of SPF 50 sunscreen
- 2 canisters of bug spray
- General cold medicine (1 dayquil and 1 nyquil)
- 1 box of decongestant.
- Pepto Bismol or other digestive relief/acid reflux
- Hydrocortisone cream.
- Antibiotic cream.
- Band aids.
- Tylenol and Advil (bring one acetaminophen and one ibuprofen.
- Menstruating products for your comfort as needed.

○ Durable water bottle without straw; don't worry about bringing a water filter or a water bottle with filtration system.

Other essential Items

○ Laptop computer.

○ Headphones or earbuds or ear plugs.

○ Items to make you feel comfortable sitting on an airplane, for example, book, crossword puzzles, sudoku

○ A pillowcase is recommended if you feel you need one suited to your needs e.g. if you have sensitive skin.

○ A good sleep mask. Test it out before coming!!!

○ Portable charger.

○ Power adapter (UK).

○ Bandanas.

○ Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector