Ghana: Cultural Legacies, Globalization, and the Afro-Chic

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Ghana, about the size of Great Britain and twice the size of New York state, is located on the western coast of Africa. The country is bordered by Cote D'Ivoire in the east, Togo in the west, Burkina Faso in the north and the Gulf of Guinea in the south. It is known for the friendliness of its 33 million people, vibrant culture, delicious food, and unique fusion of the modern and the traditional. The first African country south of the Sahara to gain independence from European colonialism, Ghana recently celebrated its 65th independence anniversary and practices a democratic political system that is a combination of the British parliamentary and American presidential systems. There are 60-80 languages spoken in Ghana, which include Asante Twi, Hausa, Dagbanli, Ewe, Nzema, and Ga. Although English is the official language, Asante Twi, which you will be learning, is widely spoken by most Ghanaians.

Having had a vibrant multiparty democracy since 1992, Ghana is known for its political and economic stability. The economy is largely agricultural, and its exports include cocoa, timber, palm oil, and non-traditional exports such as pineapples and cashews. A country formerly known as the Gold Coast, another of Ghana's major exports is gold.

Ghanaians are a very religious people and signs of their adherence to various faiths are seen on buildings, billboards, and on vehicles in cities and villages. Churches and mosques are found on most street corners and the signs on shops and public transportation are often a testament to the owner's faith. This may be surprising to non-religious visitors but they generally come to quickly understand that religion is an integral part of the Ghanaian's daily life. Although sometimes more complex than it suggests, official figures indicate that 69% of Ghanaians are Christian and 15% Muslim, with followers of African traditional and other religions making up the rest. Ghanaians are respectful of other religions

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and a person without any religious beliefs is more likely to raise eyebrows than one who is of a less mainstream faith.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Ghana has three main climatic regions: a humid coastal region due to the cooler offshore waters and the west-southwest to east-northeast prevailing winds; the inland hill plateau country where the rainfall increases; and the drier harmattan of the north. Accra and Cape Coast are representative of the drier coastal strip and are quite sunny. Kumasi and Sunyani, further inland, have greater amounts of rainfall, while Tamale, Wa, and Bolgatanga experience harmattan weather.

ACCRA, GHANA AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
88/75	88/76	88/76	87/75

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
81/73	85/74	87/75	88/75

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Due to Ghanaian cultural norms, female students may find that host families might be overly interested in their activities outside the homestay due to security concerns. This can be very disconcerting for many students, so be sure you are ready to make some lifestyle changes before you get here. You can also discuss discomfort with this and have them adjust. We do our best to match students to families where they will best fit, though some individual needs are not always met. It is helpful to use all these experiences as learning moments.

Greetings are important and expressions such as “I am sorry” (i.e. American “excuse me”) and the use of honorifics and appropriate salutations– especially with older persons–are a normal part of everyday protocol and etiquette. You will usually not call your elders by the first names but will typically use titles (Mr., Mrs., Dr., Prof.) or “Auntie”, “Sister”, “Brother”, or “Uncle” even if they are no relation to you.

The use of the left hand is strongly discouraged and highly undesirable in most contexts, especially in interpersonal transactions such as greetings, giving and receiving, and even raising up hands in a classroom. Young people often preface their statements and responses to older persons with the word) “Please” (mepa wo kyƐw), a sign of respect.

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.

Most Ghanaians begin and end the day early and so you will have to make some adjustments when it comes to mealtimes. You should expect to eat breakfast around 7am, lunch at 12pm, and dinner around 6:30pm with a little variation as may be needed during excursions. Rice, plantain, yam, and fufu are the staple foods of Ghana. These are usually served with beans, spinach, a spicy peanut/palmnut soup, or tomato-based sauce that often includes fish, meat, or eggs. Your homestay family will clarify such issues with you once you move into their home.

Vegetarian/vegan meals are not as mainstream as in the United States. Nevertheless, it is possible to have your meals without animal protein.

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. The estimated cost for meals that are not provided is based on buying groceries and making your own meals for the meals that are not provided during program activities. If you plan on eating out regularly, you should budget more money.

Please remember to budget at least **$2,390** 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

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 for about a month. You will have your own room and where you do not have your own bathroom you will have shared access to a bathroom. Wifi is not available in all homestays, and even though Ghana has a very hot climate, air-conditioning is not available in typical homes, because of cost. There will be fans available in such cases. You might also have to utilize bucket showers.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

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

During orientation and excursions, you will be housed in hostels, hotels, or local inns. These accommodations are expected to meet basic standards for hygiene and service; but you should not expect five-star hotel standards here. SIT staff help students arrange their own accommodations during the ISP/internship period. Quite often, students will stay with former homestay families or contacts they have made during their time in Ghana. Hostels, AirBnBs, and local inns are also available as options during your ISP/internship.

TRANSPORTATION

Most people use local taxis, ubers and mini-buses called Tro-tros for daily transportation in Accra, Kumasi, and most towns. During excursions and long trips, we will use tour buses.

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.

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 wifi. If needed, during orientation SIT Study Abroad staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card, and a mobile wifi device (called a mifi) for more convenient browsing on the go.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, 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
c/o Nikitta Adjirakor,
35 Wulomei Street
Kwashieman, Accra
Ghana

MONEY

Everyone will have the chance to change dollars into the local currency during orientation. Ghana's currency is known as the Ghana Cedi (GH₵). Cash is used for most daily transactions and the use of checks and traveler's checks for *direct purchases* is rare. Credit and debit cards on the other hand are mainly restricted to restaurants, bars, clubs, and hotels.

Cash can be exchanged at the bank or Foreign Exchange Bureaus (Forex Bureaus). Larger denominations such as US$50 or US$100 bills attract a higher exchange rate than US$20, US$10, US$5, or US$1 bills.

Although debit and credit cards (VISA preferred) are not in common use as direct forms of payment, they can be used to withdraw cash at ATMs depending on the issuing bank. It may also be possible to get a cash advance on your VISA or MasterCard credit card by going into a bank such as Barclays in Accra (again, VISA preferred). You will need to take your passport with you for this kind of transaction. For security reasons, using credit cards to make direct payments is not recommended. ATMs are mostly available in major cities and are harder to find in the smaller towns.

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$4,400-$6,050for 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. Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	$1,000
Meals not provided:	$2,390

Up-front medical costs:	$500-700
Potential ISP/internship travel expenses:	$450-$650
Bottled Water	$50-$100
Typical Internet/Phone usage:	$200-$550
Estimated total:	$4,400-$6,050

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance BlueCross BlueShield, 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

Ghanaians tend to dress more modestly and more formally than Americans. Plan on a combination of casual, business casual, and somewhat dressy (four to five) items. Ghanaians are also very fastidious in personal hygiene; you will offend people by wearing dirty clothes and by not taking regular showers, especially in the homestay. The clothes that you bring should all be washable and breathable, preferably drip-dry cotton and cotton-blends. Do not bring sloppy clothes or clothes with immodest pictures or writing on them. Revealing clothing or very informal clothing, are frowned upon in formal contexts. Clothing should be modest, skirts should not be too short, clothing should not be see-through, and plunging necklines are socially unapproved especially in formal settings.

Key words to keep in mind when selecting clothing are: clean, neat, in good condition, presentable and comfortable.
Urban Ghanaians are very fashionable, and cotton materials, particularly wax cotton prints, are plentiful. Once you settle, you can have one of the many recommended fashion designers create something for you at a good price.

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/.

The standard voltage in Ghana is 220-240 volts AC.

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.

Ghanaians are a gift giving and gift receiving people. Anything you bring will be welcomed and appreciated.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

One can generally obtain most toiletries, school supplies, and personal items in country although specific brands may differ. Please bring hand-washable clothes. Clothes can be easily made in country at affordable prices. Shea products, waist beads, and sculptures are relatively cheap and very popular among students.

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

- 2/3 sweaters, sweatshirts, or windbreakers for cool nights
- 3/4 ‘workout’ outfits (could include T-shirt shorts for jogging/sports/dance class)
- Underwear (4 weeks’ supply)
- Lightweight hiking boots or sneakers for hiking (if they’re new, break them in before you leave)
- Supportive tennis shoes or comfortable walking sandals (not flip-flops)
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Flip-flops or other casual indoor shoes
- 8 - 10 pants, skirts and/or dresses
- 1 pair of beat-up shoes
- 2 pairs of lightweight pants
- 8 - 10 light shirts/blouses/short-sleeved shirts
- Swimwear
- 5 shorts
- 4/5 nice outfits

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa and passport page
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Hypoallergenic items if you are sensitive, such as sensitive skin soap, deodorant
- Prescription medications used regularly
- Over the counter medications as approved by your doctor:
  - Pain reliever/fever reducer
- Cold medication/decongestant (can be purchased locally)
  - Laxative
- Anti-diarrhea medication such as Imodium (can be purchased locally)
  - Travel sickness medication
- Good quality thermometer (for taking your temperature)
- Sunscreen/Solarcaine spray

- Band-Aids/antiseptic/antibacterial cream
- Mosquito repellent with 20-30% DEET for use on skin and up to 100% DEET (permethrin) for use on clothing
- Vitamin supplements (if you take them)
- 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.
- Towel
- Hand-wipes and/or antibacterial hand wash
- Tampons or sanitary napkins (consider enough for 3 1/2 months, they are available, but not in all sizes/types)
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Hair ties
- Cliff bars or other small snacks

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Good quality, small locks (for luggage)
- Daypack or book/shoulder bag
- Canteen or water bottle
- Handkerchief (can be purchased locally)
- Notebooks/writing material (can be purchased locally)
- Extra pair of glasses/contacts if you wear them
- Sunglasses if you use them
- Ziploc bags (a few)
- Extra batteries for all electronic items (can be purchased locally)
- USB flash drive
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector