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

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Morocco is nestled on the northwestern tip of Africa, bordering Algeria and Mauritania, and it is separated from the rest of the continent by the towering Atlas Mountains and by the Sahara itself. Morocco's coast extends along the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, a strategic position, which has, over centuries, made the country home to successive civilizations including the Phoenicians, Vandals, Byzantines, Carthaginians, Romans, and eventually Arab tribes who moved from Arabia. Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has opted for a constitutional monarchy as a mode of political governance. However, though the country is endowed with a multi-party system and a Parliament composed of Upper and Lower Houses, the Moroccan monarch enjoys effective power. In fact, the monarch is both the Head of the State and the Commander of the Faithful, a status that makes him the highest political and religious authority in the country.

In the decades following its independence, Morocco went through an authoritarian mode of governance where public liberties were suspended and basic human rights violated. Since the early 1990s, the country started a process of democratization that culminated in the coming to power of former opposition political parties in 1997, the creation of an Institute for the Amazigh Culture in 2001, the passage of the Moudawana in 2004 (hailed as the most progressive family code in the Arab world), and the release of a report by the Equity and Reconciliation Commission on human rights abuses in Morocco between 1956 and 1999. Today, Morocco is often cited as the leading Arab country in the areas of democratic elections, freedom of the press, promotion of human rights, respect of cultural diversity, and



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investment in human development. But this perspective is contested by a vibrant social movement.

The Northern Excursion includes visits to the port city of Tangier and the historic blue city of Chefchaouen. It provides students with valuable insights into the geopolitics of North Africa and the Mediterranean, focusing on migration, international relations, border politics, regional security, and the political and economic connections between Europe, North Africa, and the broader Middle East.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Rabat, Morocco:
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
63/46	65/47	68/49	71/52	74/55

AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
80/63	81/62	77/58	70/53	65/48

The climate varies from area to area. The coast has a warm, Mediterranean climate tempered on the eastern coast by southwest trade winds. Inland areas have a hotter, drier, continental climate. In the south, the weather is very hot and dry throughout most of the year, with the coolest nights in the months of December and January. Rain falls from November to March in coastal areas and throughout the country. Temperatures are mainly hot and dry during the summer. While there is a cooler climate in the mountains, Marrakech and Agadir enjoy an average temperature of 21° C (approximately 70° F) in the winter.

The excursion to Northern Morocco explores the Mediterranean region through visits to Tangier and Chefchaouen, highlighting cultural interactions, migration, and the geopolitical connections between North Africa and Europe. The excursion to Southern Morocco offers a unique experience of the Atlas Mountains, desert landscapes, and Amazigh culture, providing insights into the region's rich heritage, cultural diversity, and historical connections with the broader Middle East and North Africa.



The program includes an excursion to Istanbul, Turkey, a city connecting East and West with a rich geopolitical history. Students explore Turkey's growing political, economic, and cultural influence in the Middle East, its regional and international relations, and issues related to migration and minorities. Through meetings with local experts and peers from Istanbul University, students gain insights into Turkey's relations with Syria, Iran, Israel, Russia, the US, and the EU. The excursion also includes visits to major historical and cultural sites, such as the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace, the Grand Bazaar, and Suleymaniye Mosque, as well as a boat cruise along the Bosphorus.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

In general, greetings start in Morocco with *Salam Alikoom* and often a handshake can be enough. Moroccans tend also to kiss on the cheeks for greetings, especially among people from the same gender, but it will not be seen as culturally inappropriate if you are not comfortable with physical contact and prefer to just say *salam* for your greeting

Moroccans are very conservative with regard to any display of couples' affection. While holding hands can be acceptable, more openly affectionate gestures such as kissing are not acceptable. Short skirts and dresses are to be avoided and you may opt for modest and conservative clothes. Staying out late and coming back home with alcohol smell on your breath is not acceptable for either males or females, but even more so for females.

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.

Mealtimes vary according to families. Dinner in particular is usually served late in the evening around 9 pm, but your wishes for earlier mealtime can be accommodated. Also, families take into account your special diet (vegetarian, gluten-free, and vegan).

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.

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 **$1,120** 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 on your program's predeparture page.

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.

During the program, you will live with a local host family in the historic medina of Rabat, Morocco's capital, offering a unique opportunity to experience Moroccan culture and daily family life. The medina is known for its traditional Andalusian-style homes and close-knit communities. You will share two meals a day with your host family during weekdays and three meals a day on weekends, practice Moroccan Arabic (Darija), and experience local traditions and daily activities. Students should expect modest but comfortable accommodations and may be required to share a room with another student. Homes vary in size and facilities, and students should be prepared for hot weather, limited or no air-conditioning, and Wi-Fi that may not always be available. Bathroom facilities may also differ, including traditional squat toilets or bucket showers in some homes. Students are expected to respect family customs, household rules, and cultural traditions. During the final four weeks of the program (ISP or internship period), students may choose to continue living with their host family or receive a housing stipend to arrange their own accommodation.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

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

During excursions, the group generally stays in hotels, where you will share rooms with other SIT students.

TRANSPORTATION

Our host institution, Langzone, is located near downtown Rabat. Its strategic location near the famous Mohammed V Boulevard makes it a stone's throw from cafés, restaurants, shops, banks, parks, main post office, Rabat Ville train station, tram stations, taxi ranks and roughly 15-minute walk from the medina of Rabat.

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.

You can purchase a local SIM card for DH 40 -50 (USD $4 – 5), a local smart phone will be DH 500 – 2,000 (USD $50 – 200). You can purchase credit as you go and top it up at many local retailers. Costs will vary depending on how much you use your phone, international calls will be more expensive.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. The program does provide email access to students within the Langzone Center. Langzone closes daily at 6:00 pm and is also closed on Sundays and holidays. The program will provide a USB mobile internet stick for students to use during the semester and pays for their monthly subscription. The students will have to leave a deposit of 400 MAD (approximately $50) which they will get back at the end of the semester upon their return of the mobile internet stick. The USB mobile internet stick will allow students access to the internet remotely wherever there is mobile service. You are responsible for this item, and if it is lost, stolen, or broken, you will not receive your deposit back.

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
LangZone Center
3 Rue Hims, Apt 1.
Rabat
Morocco

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

Student Name
[Address for packages]
Student Name
LangZone Center
3 Rue Hims, Apt 1.
Rabat
Morocco

MONEY

The currency is the Moroccan Dirham (DH or MAD) and is divided into 100 centimes. Many banks have ATMs, so it is relatively easy to get money. However, the program recommends that you only withdraw what money you need at the time. Keep in mind that ATMs are generally only found in cities and towns and some branches are not available in the smaller towns and rural areas. A Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit card is very useful for emergencies, medical or otherwise. It is also possible to wire money to Morocco using Western Union, which is now available in all urban centers.

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$2200 to $4000** 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)	$600-1,500
Meals Not Provided	$1,120
Books, printing, supplies:	$120
Up-front medical costs:	$240-1,200
Potential ISP travel expenses:	$120-240
USB Internet stick (deposit will be refunded at end of program)	$50
Cell phone:	$50 – 300
Estimated total:	$2,200-4,000

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

It is important to note that Morocco is a land of contrast. Some women wear the traditional Moroccan dress (*djellaba*) and some wear modern clothes. You will see that quite a few women wear the *hijab* while others choose to wear revealing and very informal clothing, such as tank tops, especially in urban areas like Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech. However, SIT prefers that students dress like the majority of the young people: modest and conservative. Students have always found jeans very practical.

EQUIPMENT

You do not need to bring tents, mosquito nets, or a sleeping bag. In the packing list below, we have tried to list all important items you may need for the months you will spend in Morocco. Although it will not be necessary to carry everything that you bring during excursions, we still encourage you to pack lightly. When packing, do not forget to include flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor. This is the best preparation for the months ahead.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

LangZone, the program's host institution in Morocco, has a reliable wireless system. Some students may find it useful and much easier to use their own laptops to write their seminar papers and ISP final project. You will also need your laptop because readings and assignments are given in electronic form to save paper. Moodle is also used, and you will need an external CD drive for your Arabic homework if your laptop does not have one. In addition, it is easier for you if you have your laptop to stay in contact with your academic director concerning academic material or with friends in Morocco and in the US. It is not possible to rent laptops in Morocco. Thus, the program highly recommends that you bring your laptop with you. Otherwise, access to computers will be limited to Internet cafés.

If you plan to use video in your ISP project, then you have to bring with you the necessary audio-visual equipment you will need (video camera, tapes, microphones, etc.), as the program does not provide such equipment. You will be responsible for making arrangements to store your laptop and any other electronic equipment you choose to bring with you in a secure place while on excursions. However, it will not be difficult to find ways to keep your laptop and your electronic equipment safe.

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

You will only need a plug adapter for your laptop, as all laptop chargers work with 220 voltages. However, do not bring any electrical appliances without voltage converters and two-prong adapters. The electric current is 220 volts. Outlets in Morocco use plug types C and E.

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.

The program recommends one gift per family, something that the whole family can share such as chocolate (without alcohol) or a souvenir from your state that can decorate the living room. Please avoid anything with alcohol or pork as these will be offensive to the culture.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

One can generally obtain most of the above toiletries in franchised stores or big supermarkets in Rabat and other major cities like Casablanca, but usually at a higher price, and specific brands may not be available. Due to the lack of available laundromats in Morocco and many families not having washing machines, you may end up doing your laundry by hand and hanging it up to dry.

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 (Tevas 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
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

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

- ISIC card-Student international card
- 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)*
- Students are encouraged to bring a **battery-operated carbon monoxide detector***)*