Tunisia and Italy: Politics and Religious Integration in the Mediterranean

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Tunisia is situated in North Africa. Its recorded history goes back at least three millennia, with the foundation of Phoenician colonies, the most famous of which was Carthage, established in 814 BC.

Modern Tunisians are the descendants of indigenous Amazigh (Berber) tribes as well as of numerous Mediterranean, Arab, and European peoples: Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Arabs, Ottoman Turks, and French.

Tunisia was a French Protectorate from 1881 until independence in 1956. In 1957, Tunisia became a republic with Habib Bourguiba as its first president.

Tunisia is a leader in the Arab and Muslim world in promoting modern state institutions, universal education for both sexes, and the legal and social rights of women. It is perhaps due to these progressive policies that Tunisian people (and especially the younger generation) were the protagonists of the first civil uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa on December 17, 2010, later dubbed the Jasmine Revolution.

Post-revolutionary Tunisia is an exciting place to experience, observe, and study a complex political transition and a social metamorphosis. Tunisia's governance architecture is undergoing epochal changes, which are epitomized by the adoption of two constitutions in just fifteen years. More deeply, Tunisia's society is also rapidly evolving in the midst of global, regional, and

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domestic challenges. More than any other age group, Tunisian youths are searching for their identity, torn between communitarian belonging and cosmopolitan drives, religion and secularism, statism and libertarianism. Nearly all Tunisians (98%) are Muslims. but the nature and practice of their faith varies in great many ways. Although their size greatly decreased over the last Century, Tunisia also hosts a sizable historic Jewish community on the island of Djerba and in the capital and a small Christian community dispersed across the country. Arabic is the official language, but the vast majority speak Tunisian darija (colloquial Arabic), many speak French, and an increasing number speaks English, especially among educated youth.

Tunisia is North Africa's closest country to Italy, but the proximity between these two countries is not just geographical. A multi-millennial common historical heritage binds them through culture, art, food, and way of life. Central and Southern Italy are much closer to North Africa than to central Europe, also in people's way of life and political culture.

No place showcases this Mediterranean mix of civilizations better than Palermo, with churches, mosques, and synagogues neighboring each other, downtown street placards in Italian, Arabic, and Hebrew, and a colorful local language that appropriated and customized words from across the Mediterranean. For these reasons, Palermo is a fascinating vantage point to observe Mediterranean people and culture, without neglecting its exquisite food, sheer beauty, and great weather.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Tunisian and Sicilian climates are Mediterranean, which means temperate winters, hot summers, and long, enjoyable 'mid-seasons' between September and November, and between March and May. With temperatures that can reach 50° C (122º F) in the summer, Tunisians call a winter day "cold" when the temperature is 10° C (50º F).

[Sidi Bou Said]: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
46/61	46/61	48/66	54/72	59/79

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
68/86	63/79	54/70	48/63

Mediterranean weather is sometimes described as the kind of weather that is too hot for apples and too cold for bananas. The weather in Palermo will be very similar to the climate in Tunisia, due to their remarkable geographical proximity: Palermo is much closer to Tunis than it is to Rome, and it sits at the same latitude as southern Sicily.

Rainfall, though unpredictable and variable from year to year, is more abundant in the northern parts of the country, including the capital (75-85 inches/year), than in the south, where many months may pass before a drop is seen. Fall thunderstorms, occurring typically in September and October, can sometimes be spectacular. In the context of global climate change, Tunisians, are increasingly confronted with water stress, which is the ratio between water demand and the renewable water supply.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Although Tunisians consider themselves more liberal than their neighbors, the country's strong religious identity has deeply permeated the predominant culture. Even Westernized Tunisians adhere to conservative social norms and behaviors, and society still preserves traditional values, first among which is the central role of family in social life. Meals are important for family gathering. Tunisian cuisine is a melange of different traditions, including Berber (indigenous people of North Africa), Andalusian (Islamic Spain), Ottoman, Italian (particularly Sicilian), French, and Jewish. Couscous is a staple, along with brik (egg-filled and fried phyllo dough) and tagine (baked egg casserole, very different from Moroccan's tagine). Mloukhiya, a long-simmered, dark green stew made from ground dried leaves is another emblematic, beloved, and unique Tunisian dish. Lastly, local high quality olive oil and spicy harissa, a fiery hot sauce, are a must on every table.

Tunisians are fond of going to cafes where they meet friends, drink coffee, and debate sports and political events. Although many cafes are only populated by men, most cafes in Greater Tunis are gender mixed.

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.

Tunisian and Sicilian food are Mediterranean: couscous, pizza, and multiple pasta varieties with all sorts of seafood, meat, vegetables, and ubiquitous tomato and olive oil. Many Tunisians like their food spicy hot; this is achieved by adding a condiment called *harissa*. If you are averse to

it, you may ask the waiter in restaurants or your host family to remove *harissa* from your food. Most Tunisian eat a light lunch and a larger late dinner around 8 or 9 pm. They start with a salad or a soup, which is followed by a main course that is typically couscous, pasta, or a stew. During Ramadan (The Holy Month of Fasting), Tunisian have sumptuous dinners after a long day of fasting. Similarly to most of their regional fellows, Tunisians love sweets and add a large amount of sugar to juices, tea, and coffee. This said, with some diligence, almost all diets can be accommodated in Tunisia.

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 **$1,280.00** 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.

On this program, you will be staying in *one six-week* homestay.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

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

During group excursions, students will stay in shared hotel rooms. In the south of Tunisia, students may spend one night in troglodytes (cave dwellings). During ISP time, if you choose to leave homestay, you will be given a per diem to cover basic accommodation and board costs; you will be responsible for finding your own accommodation and food while undertaking your research.

TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation in Tunisia is very affordable but not particularly reliable nor comfortable. In Tunis, the usual mixture of bus, train, and metro prevails. Pick-pockets are very common, as in most large cities in the world. Yellow cabs are also available for a maximum of three passengers and run by the meter with very affordable fares. Most cabs also dub as on-call drivers through mobile app platforms, such as InDrive and Yassir. After the closure of Bolt mobile platform, InDrive appears to be the most effective transportation app. One of the selection criteria of our host families has been accessibility to SIT premises.

Whenever possible, travel with other students to discourage low-level harassment. It is generally safer and more convenient to use yellow cabs or better still InDrive, whose app you can install on your phone.

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 buy a local SIM for TND 12 (USD $5) or even get it for free upon arrival at the airport. It may also be worth bringing a cheap smart phone or buying it locally for approximately TND 350 (USD $150). Phone lines typically operate through prepaid mobile services. Keeping your phone stocked with credit is easy through 'scratch' recharge cards that are sold in retail stores ('coshk' in Tunisian Arabic) or by purchasing credit through your mobile company store. It is wise to always keep one or two spare 'scratch' recharge cards on your wallet to add phone credit even if you don't find a store or if you run out of cash., Students can use WhatsApp, Signal, Messenger, and any other app to call their families and maintain contact with local staff and home. In Italy, you can purchase a local SIM card. The accommodation where they stay provides access to Wi-Fi.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours in auditorium and lounge areas.

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
[c/o SIT
13 Impasse Ain Touila
Immeuble Abderrazek
Sidi Bousaid 2026
Tunisia]

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

Student Name
[c/o SIT
13 Impasse Ain Touila
Immeuble Abderrazek
Sidi Bousaid 2026
Tunisia

MONEY

Tunisia's financial system is based on a non-convertible dinar. In practical terms, it means that you can withdraw local currency and/or bring in foreign currency – within the limits set by your bank and/or by local authorities – and convert it into Tunisian dinars.[1] However, you cannot freely convert Tunisian dinars into foreign currency, nor travel abroad carrying Tunisian dinars beyond petty cash (less than 100 TND should be fine).

Because Tunisia's economy depends so much on tourism, there is no shortage of ATMs, even in remote villages. Virtually all credit cards are accepted, but Visa and MasterCard are the most common and preferred. Make sure you have your cash withdrawal PIN number in order to retrieve cash from an ATM.

[1] Non-residents are allowed to bring into the country up to the equivalent in foreign currency of 5000 Tunisian dinars without the need to declare it. More information is available at https://share.google?link=https://lapresse.tn/2025/05/26/ce-quil-faut-savoir-avant-dentrer-ou-de-sortir-de-tunisie-avec-des-devises/&utm_campaign=17652761-or-igacx-web-shrbtn-iga-share&utm_source=igadl,igatpdl,sh/x/gs/m2/5

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$2500 to $2900** 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.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	1000 USD
Meals Not Provided	1280 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	100 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Potential ISP travel expenses:	150 USD
Estimated total:	2580-3030 USD

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

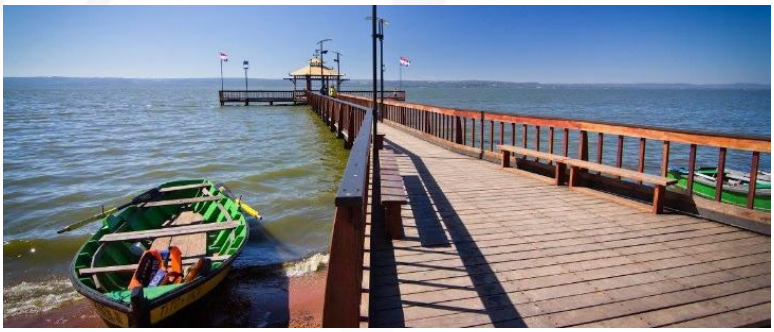
SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that 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

There is no particular dress code that is legally enforced in Tunisia, unlike in some other Arab or Muslim countries. In the streets, you will observe a mixture of traditional and western styles. The appropriate dress for foreign men and women in Tunisia generally implies long pants, T-shirts, polo shirts, coats, jeans, jackets, dress shirts, or blouses with a normal neckline. In warm weather, T-shirts and long modest shorts/skirts are acceptable.

When visiting religious sites or more conservative areas of the country (Kairouan, the Ghriba synagogue in Djerba, and rural areas during excursions, for instance), both men and women may want to have a long-sleeved shirt to wear. Both men and women may be asked to wear a headscarf or a *yarmulke* to enter some religious buildings, such as the synagogue on the island of Djerba (*yarmulke* and headscarves provided) and the Great Mosque of Kairouan.

EQUIPMENT

You do not need to bring tents, mosquito nets, or a sleeping bag. In the section of the packing list below, we have tried to list all possible important items you may need for the months you will spend in Tunisia. It will not be necessary to carry everything that you bring during excursions; however, we still encourage you to pack lightly. When packing, do not forget to include flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor, they are by far the most useful 'pieces of equipment'.

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/.

SIT has internet and Wi-Fi connections. At SIT, you may use the connection from 9 am to 5 pm,. Some students have found it useful and much easier to use their own laptops to write their seminar papers and ISP final project. It is also easier for you if you have your laptop to stay in contact with your academic director or with friends in Tunisia and in the US. You will not be charged any customs fees for your laptop. It is advisable to insure your computer against loss or theft. Note that Tunisia runs on 230 Volt / 50 Hertz electricity grid and uses plug Type C (two round parallel pins) or type E (two round pins and a hole for the socket's male earthing pin. Hence, depending on your computer and charger, you may need a voltage converter in addition to one or more plug adapters (also for your phone).

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

Most international brands of toiletry and cosmetics are available in Tunisia, either in pharmacies (more expensive) or in special stores. School supplies (notebooks, pens, pencils, etc.) are also available and affordable (the majority of locally-made items are state-subsidized), though the quality may be less than desired.

There are no US-type large drugstores, which mean that over-the-counter medication is only obtainable at pharmacies and tends therefore to be expensive. Make sure to bring the items that you are accustomed to or use most regularly if you cannot do without them. Also, pharmacies often suffer from episodic shortages of specific medicines.

As for laundry services, your host family is expected to take care of your washables. Dry cleaning is available, though cost varies; you should expect to pay 10 dinars for a shirt or pair of pants.

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 suitable for a social event
- Lightweight clothes including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts
- Underwear and socks (10-day supply)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house. Flip flops not recommended for use outdoors because of the cobble stone sidewalks and roads.)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair sandals / open shoes
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- 2–4 pairs pants or jeans
- 1 skirt and/or dress
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2–3 blouses or button-down shirts
- Sweater
- Jacket or fleece
- Scarf
- Bathing suits
- Optional – workout clothes

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport and a scan saved on your computer and emailed to a family member
- Photocopy of visa and a scan saved on your computer and emailed to a family member
- 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

- Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Flashlight
- French/English and/or Arabic/English pocket dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- Laptop computer *(wise to insure it)*
- Smartphone
- voltage converter and one or more plug adapters
- Students are encouraged to bring a **battery-operated carbon monoxide detector**