There will also be an orientation session in the first day or two of each country covering country specific details.

**Classroom Space**
In all of the countries you visit, you will generally have a “main” classroom location where you will attend faculty lectures and welcome guest lecturers. However, the city and rural location will also become your classroom as you go on site visits, explore neighborhoods, conduct research, and travel to other sites within the region.

**Diet**
Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in many countries. You should be willing to try the local cuisine and share in your host family’s mealtimes. Special or restricted diets may not 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 will miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Be clear with your family about what your dietary needs are. It is always a good idea to be very honest with your host family as to what you like and dislike, as this will inform the remaining weeks of your homestay. SIT homestay parents are generally used to our students negotiating around quantities of food.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context. In some
locations, we cannot guarantee zero exposure to certain foods or a given allergen.

**Vietnam:** Vietnamese cuisine shows diversity from north to south, as well as similarities with Chinese and Southeast Asian cuisine. Even French cuisine and food culture has been adapted in striking ways. There is an emphasis on fresh vegetables and herbs, often served in a broth or light sauce. The most common meats used in Vietnamese cuisine are pork, beef, chicken, prawns, and various kinds of fish and sea food.

Hanoi offers a fantastic range of food choices that can compete with any world city – ranging from small outdoor food stalls, to Asian, European and American-style restaurants, and even some familiar fast food chains. A good choice for breakfast is the world-renowned pho, a noodle soup usually made with beef or chicken. Lunch will typically consist of rice with meat or fish, plus a side vegetable dish and soup. Sandwiches with pâté and other fillings are also common quick meals. Vietnamese dinners are often more elaborate, including several shared meat and vegetable dishes, usually accompanied by rice and soup. Street foods are generally safe if they are well cooked. Always wash vegetables or fruit if buying from the street vendors.

It is possible to maintain a vegetarian diet while in Vietnam, though you may wish to ask whether fish or meat products have been added to vegetable dishes. Veganism is practiced by some Vietnamese Buddhists, particularly on festival days, and there are some vegan restaurants. For those wishing to remain kosher, pork is a popular meat and flavoring, but milk and dairy products are rarely used in cooking. Yogurt is available and often used in blended fruit drinks. You can easy buy yogurt in any convenient store.

**South Africa:** Many traditional rituals involve food and it is a sign of pride and generosity that even in the poorest houses there is always a meal waiting for the unexpected visitor. Students generally enjoy the diet in South Africa, which may be in many ways not dissimilar to your own. However it tends to include more starch and meat than you would normally be used to. In Bushbuckridge the staple diet is pap and nyama, similar to grits; made from ground up corn and served with some meat – generally chicken. When you land in Johannesburg you'll be able to experience a wide variety of foods. South Africa’s main contribution to the world culinary repertoire is the braai, known in the U.S. as the barbeque, which is taken out at the first possible opportunity. You will enjoy many of these during your time in South Africa.

As you may gather, South Africans enjoy meat, but if you are not a meat eater do not worry. Homestay families are used to catering to vegetarian, vegan and kosher diets. The homestay coordinator will discuss your special needs with your family before you begin your homestays and plan accordingly.

**Argentina:** The diet of Argentina is largely influenced by the Mediterranean region, both in food and schedule. Meal times in Argentina are generally similar to those in the United States, except dinners tend to be eaten much later in the evening (9–10 pm). The staple diet in Argentina is all types of meat, breads, pasta, sandwiches, etc. It is also a common custom to drink mate, an infusion of herbs in hot water drunk through a metal straw called a bombilla. The day begins with a light breakfast, which typically includes a cup of tea or coffee, croissants/bread and marmalade. In Buenos Aires a lunch generally consists of an entrée (a type of meat, a starch option, and salad) and dessert. Argentines rarely use beans in their meals and the food is not spicy at all. In rural communities, many families eat a type of stew called puchero, made up of different vegetables and meats, but the most typical food in the countryside is the asado (barbecue). At 5 pm, many families have what is called a merienda, a light meal similar to the breakfast meal. Argentine food is generally eaten with very little use of condiments.

There is a great variety of food available in Buenos Aires stores: fruit, vegetables, and meats. There are also lots of restaurants. Generally, there is one individual in the home who does the majority of the cooking.

Vegetarians can manage their diets in Buenos Aires, but it may require a bit more effort on their part and is subject to availability of vegetables in the country.
market. The Argentine diet, as mentioned before, is largely centered on meat, so it will be necessary to be very clear to your hosts about your dietary preferences. Lastly, it is quite possible to keep kosher in Buenos Aires.

Local Customs:

Vietnam: Most of the Vietnamese in urban areas no longer bow when they meet each other. The custom of handshaking is now achieving popularity due to the Western influence in the country. Men will generally shake hands and say the equivalent of "how are you" and tip their hats when greeting people. Women, especially those in the countryside, still shy away from shaking hands, especially with men from their own country. It is best not to offer to shake hands with a woman unless she offers her hand first.

 Whereas Americans often immediately introduce themselves in given situations, the ordinary people of Vietnam think this to be rather bold and like to have a mutual acquaintance make the introduction. They will rarely introduce themselves when going into a home or office until asked to do so. This may be due to their innate shyness and modesty. Names carry great importance in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese names consist of a family name, middle name and a personal or given name. The order is reverse to the American custom. For instance, Miss Hoang Ngoc Van. Hoang is the family name. We would call her Miss Van.

 Vietnamese people have a habit of not looking into your eyes when they talk to you. This is often because of shyness, but another reason is that traditionally they do not look into the eyes of those they respect or those higher in rank when talking to them. This is to indicate politeness. The smile of a Vietnamese can be confusing to foreigners and cause misunderstandings. It may indicate a polite, but perhaps skeptical reaction to something, compliance or toleration of a blunder or misunderstanding, or on occasion, represents submission to judgment that may be wrong or unfair. This is particularly true if the one making the judgment is at a superior level and perhaps has lost his temper. For instance, a laundress may ruin a favorite shirt and is called in by her employer to be asked about it. She may smile. This does not mean that she thinks it is funny that she burned the shirt, but instead is submission to the fact. If the owner of the shirt loses his temper, she may keep smiling indicating politeness or patience with superiors.

Because of this, foreigners should be very cautious in voicing their opinions and perhaps be a little more delicate and tolerant.

South Africa: South Africa is one of the most multicultural countries in the world; it has eleven official languages and as many different ethnic groups, particularly in urban areas. As such, it is difficult to generalize on South African etiquette and culture due to the diversity; however, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Cultural Dos: Be polite – Greet people when you meet them. Greetings are leisurely and include time for social discussion and exchanging pleasantries. In Bushbuckridge people will appreciate it if you try to greet them in their vernacular.  Clean up after yourself – you are expected to clean after yourself in your home stay, in the classroom, and in hotel rooms. Be on time to class and meetings.

Cultural Don’ts: Be careful of being overly friendly – it might be misinterpreted as sending romantic signals. Do not smoke indoors.

Argentina: Regarding etiquette and courtesy, Argentina follows the common rules of most western countries. However there are some special details to keep in mind: in informal meetings, Argentineans greet with a kiss in the cheek, while in formal ones they shake hands. It is important to always greet your homestay family and to say good morning and goodnight. "Please" and "thank you" are mandatory when requesting something and also when shopping. Also, and very important, it is very impolite to be barefoot in the classroom and to put legs on a chair while attending a lecture or in any other academic session. Finally it is important to note that the idea of personal space in Argentina is quite flexible. Argentineans embrace a lot and touch each other when they want or need attention.

Transportation:
Across locations, students will often use public transportation. Specifics on public transportation will be discussed during the orientation upon your arrival in a country.

**Vietnam:** It is recommended that students commute to class each day by public bus. You also have the option of travel by taxi or bicycle.

**South Africa:** Transportation will vary depending upon location and will include mini-bus taxis, buses, and private taxis (sharing with other students is encouraged).

**Argentina:** Public transportation in Buenos Aires is very good. Participants are easily able to move throughout the city by public bus or subway. This mode of transportation is cheap and safe during the daytime. The use of taxis is also affordable and safe. Transportation on a daily basis will include public bus, subways, or walking. Specifics on public transportation in Buenos Aires are discussed in detail during your orientation upon arrival in-country.

**Homestays and Other Accommodations**

As many IHP and SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. You will learn firsthand the joys and responsibilities of being a guest, a family member, and a friend. You will also have the opportunity to share your culture and to learn from another’s culture. 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 place, and SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families. For example, 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. They may be quite familiar with your hometown or with international students, or your homestay family may not know much about where you come from. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” (i.e., the physical nature of the house) 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 possibly new priorities and expectations.

Country coordinators in each location will arrange homestay placements. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note:** You will not receive information about your homestay family before you arrive in each country.

Not all of your lodging will be in homestays. You may also stay in hostels, hotels, rural villages, and other types of lodging. The key is to be flexible. Many students appreciate bringing a ‘sleep sack’ (a sleeping bag liner or a sheet folded in half and sewn down the side).

**Money**

In addition to tuition, SIT Study abroad program fees cover room and three meals a day throughout the program except for vacation. When meals are not provided by the program or homestay family, students will be provided a stipend. SIT will provide transportation for program-related excursions and activities that are part of the normal program itinerary, but students are responsible for the cost of daily transportation to and from class. Course materials are made available digitally and there will be some photocopies of course materials available to check out. Printing additional paper copies of course readers are the students’ responsibility. Please plan accordingly.

**You are responsible for all expenses during the vacation period including travel, room, and board.**

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. This is very important; if you don’t inform these companies that you will be away, when they see charges from another
country, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. Make sure that your PIN is only four digits — longer PINs don’t always work in other countries. Ask your bank if they have any partner banks in the countries you are traveling to. Fees are often lower through these partner banks. 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. If they will expire while you are overseas, please contact your bank and/or credit card companies for early renewal. It is also very important that you make photocopies of the front and back of all your debit/credit cards and leave them with someone you trust just in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen. Also scan and e-mail yourself a copy.

Having some U.S. cash for cases where ATMs are not available or not working is a good idea. Consider bringing $100-$300 to keep as a reserve for this purpose.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for personal spending, local travel, and one meal per day. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and these costs are averages.

A suggested total amount of money to budget is around **US$ 1,600 - $1,900**.

**To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including costs for your vacation or a specific personal expense.**


**Personal spending including vacation period (from past student suggestions):**

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<tr>
<td>Visa registration:</td>
<td>$300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local transportation:</td>
<td>$300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Books, printing, supplies</td>
<td>$100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Up-front medical costs</td>
<td>$400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated total:</td>
<td>$1600-1900</td>
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Using traveler’s checks is a safe way to carry money, since these can be replaced in case of theft or loss. Traveler’s checks may be hard to change and not give good exchange rates, but are still the safest way to bring your money. Cash is usually easier and faster to change and gets better exchange rates, but there is no insurance in case of loss or other problems. ATMs are widely available in all of the cities we will visit. A money belt large enough to hold your passport and traveler’s checks is useful.

**Vietnam:** The local currency is the Vietnamese Dong. While Vietnamese Dong can be purchased in some large U.S. banks, it is also very easy to get upon arrival in Vietnam. Students may exchange U.S. currency or withdraw Vietnamese Dong from an ATM machine inside the international airport in Hanoi upon arrival. ATM machines are in abundance throughout Vietnam. Many restaurants, large department stores and tourist boutiques take major credit cards, such as Visa and MasterCard. A Visa or MasterCard can also be helpful in emergencies, medical or otherwise.

**South Africa:** The local currency is the South African Rand. ATMs are widely available for withdrawal in Rands. But if you want to exchange currency it is advised to go to one of the commercial banks since currency exchangers charge extra fees. During orientation you will be given an approximate estimate on expenses for additional / optional activities.

**Argentina:** Although the US dollar exchange rate has tended to be stable, we do not encourage you to bring Argentine pesos with you from the US. It is quite easy to find money exchange offices throughout the airport and cities. The majority of stores in Buenos Aires also accept credit cards, the
most common being Visa, MasterCard, and American Express.

Withdrawing money from an ATM is very easy in most program locations. Keep in mind that, from our experience, lost credit/debit cards can take several weeks to replace. It is recommended that you also travel with some cash or traveler’s checks just in case of emergency or a lost credit/debit card. Please note that traveler’s checks are not accepted in all money exchange offices, and they may charge a 2–5% fee for the exchange. American Express is the most widely accepted form of traveler’s check.

Communication
While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the program abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication. We have a few suggestions regarding communication during the program, based upon our experience.

It’s important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the program. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call, thereby avoiding frustration and making connections more meaningful. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion. While you are encouraged to share with those close to you and use them for support whenever necessary, it is also important to remember that you are on the program for just a few months, and that you get out of the program what you put into it.

Do not set family or friends up with expected communication during arrivals and departures to/from new locations. It is not always possible for students to gain internet or phone access immediately upon arrival in a new country; SIT will post safe arrival updates on its facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/SITStudyAbroad.

Phones and Email
All students are required to have a working cell phone while on SIT Study Abroad programs. This policy is part of our commitment to student safety and will facilitate communication in case of an emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they are reachable by phone at all times. This means keeping the phone charged and stocked with airtime/minutes as well as notifying staff of, and replacing, lost or stolen phones. Please note that students who do not comply with the cell phone policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

Students can buy a phone in the US or upon arrival in the first non-US country. If you wish to obtain a cell phone prior to departure some options can be found here. Please bear in mind that a basic cell phone with simple call and text messaging is the best option for all programs. Expensive or flashy phones (including iPhones) are not recommended as these may attract unwanted attention in some economically depressed areas.

Look for an unlocked quad-band phone so it will work in multiple countries. Buying SIM chips as you travel from country to country is much cheaper than buying an international SIM chip. (Please note that it can be difficult for non-nationals to purchase SIM cards in certain countries.) You should research costs of making international calls and you may want to consider setting up a Skype account as well. You and/or your family member will be able to load credit to your Skype account, which can be used to call international cell phones. (Check out: http://www.skype.com/en/offers/skype-credit/)
Please do not use a host family’s phone for overseas calls. Even with a phone card, the host family may be charged a service fee just to dial out. Host phones should be reserved for the family’s use.

**Vietnam:** Telecommunications are not cheap in Vietnam and international phone calls are expensive; however, access to local and international phone lines is easy throughout Hanoi. Phone calls from Vietnam cost about US$1-2 per minute and faxes may cost US$1-2 per page. It is much less expensive to call from the U.S. to Vietnam.

You can check with your local service provider (in the US) to find out if the same number and phone will work in Vietnam or not. If you find that your phone will not work in Vietnam, it may be possible to procure a phone and SIM card in Vietnam. However, in the case you are not able to procure a SIM card, be sure to make plans for alternative communication. If buying a local SIM card, you can activate a really cheap data plan (3G) that will allow you to do many things including calling the US for free with OTT applications.

Most places that you stay in Vietnam will offer internet services, and some places have wireless internet available. In addition, there are various Internet cafes around Hanoi (usually less than US$1/hour). If you have a laptop, there are some up-market coffee shops in Hanoi with wireless Internet access.

**South Africa:** Cell phones are widely used in South Africa and offer the most convenient way to communicate with your family and with program staff. Please note that some US cell phones may not work in South Africa; if you intend to bring a cell phone from the US please make sure it’s an open phone that can accept SIM cards from different phone companies. Do not buy cheap international phone cards off the Internet – many will not work in South Africa. Local cell phone calls cost about $0.25 a minute.

**Argentina:** You will not be able to use most US-purchased calling cards in Argentina, and in any case calling cards in Argentina are less expensive than those from the US. Buenos Aires also has a multitude of calling agencies where you can make cheaper phone calls to the US. Email and Internet access is readily available throughout the major cities and is often quite inexpensive.

Students find it very useful and convenient to have a cell phone, especially in case of an emergency. Argentina’s principal cell phone systems are CDMA and TDMA. It’s also possible to use tri-band GSM world cell phones, but these tend to be much more expensive. You might want to ask your cell phone company in the US about the costs of using your phone in Argentina. If you would like to purchase a cell phone in Argentina, they range in cost is from US$60 upwards. SIM cards are easy to obtain at a very low price: US$3. You will have to charge credit on your SIM card in order to make calls. Minimum credit is of US$5.50. You will not be able to purchase calling plans in Argentina.

To call someone on a land line in Argentina from outside of Argentina, callers will need to dial their country’s international access code, then Argentina’s country code (54), then the city’s area code, and finally the number itself. The area code for Buenos Aires is 11.

**Mail**

Mail delivery can be unpredictable and erratic. Mail can take from ten days to three weeks or sometimes even longer to reach its destination. SIT does not forward student mail, and cannot be responsible for lost mail. Please account for 2-3 weeks shipping time when deciding which address to use.

An updated address list will be provided to you prior to the start of the program.

Sending and receiving packages is another matter, however. 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 (due to customs delays) that the recipient is nearly out of the country by the time the items are received. For these reasons, unless it is an emergency, parents and loved ones should refrain from sending packages. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Please inform parents, grandparents, significant others, and anyone else who might think of sending you packages, of the above. If it is necessary for someone to send you a package, please have them contact your admissions counselor.

Climate

Hanoi: Average High/Low Temperatures (°F)

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<td>Sept 89/76</td>
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<td>Feb 68/59</td>
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Bushbuckridge: Average High/Low Temperatures (°F)

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<td>Sept 80/53</td>
<td>Oct 80/57</td>
<td>Nov 80/60</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feb 84/66</td>
<td>Mar 82/64</td>
<td>Apr 81/57</td>
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Buenos Aires: Average High/Low Temperatures (°F)

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<td>Sept 65/52</td>
<td>Oct 71/58</td>
<td>Nov 77/62</td>
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<td>Feb 75/95</td>
<td>Mar 65/85</td>
<td>Apr 45/74</td>
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Visitors and Free Time

Parents or friends may wish to visit students while they are abroad. This can be a wonderful experience; however, we advise that visits should take place after the program’s conclusion or during vacation time. Based on our experience, we know that visits can take significant time away from the program as well as cause emotional tension, while also disrupting academic focus and the cycle of cultural immersion and integration. SIT does not allow students to miss program activities to accommodate visitor schedules nor will the program allow visitors’ participation in program activities. If you anticipate having a visitor, please notify the Program Director immediately.

Students may, however, have friends or fellow students of their home university studying in the same city. Meeting with those friends, outside of classes and planned program activities, is perfectly acceptable!

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student(s) and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students’ guests.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes, guest lectures and field-based learning activities. 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.

On average students have two free days a week during the program. For safety reasons, during free time (including vacations) you should always move about the city with at least one other person. There will be designated weekends during which students are allowed to travel outside of the program’s immediate area. During these weekends, students are asked to provide their destination and contact details to the local coordinator and Trustees’ Fellow. Extensive weekend travel during IHP is limited because free days are important times to relax and partake in activities with homestay families. Students are always expected to keep their hosts advised of their schedule and to inform them if they will be coming home late or missing a meal.

Vacation

There will be a one-week vacation during the program. Vacation dates and other relevant details will be sent in an email from your admissions.
Students are responsible for making their own vacation plans and covering all costs during this time. Students are not allowed to leave the country while on vacation and must travel with other SIT/IHP students or immediate family.

To help plan vacation, program coordinators may provide contact information of local resources (e.g., travel agents, volunteer or local opportunities). However, you are fully responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of vacation and/or independent travel, including but not limited to accommodations, meals and transportation. SIT is not responsible for supervising students during independent travel, vacation, or time away from the program.

SIT does not allow participants to travel outside of the country where the vacation is based; vacation should be used as a time for rest and relaxation. Travel outside of the country can lead to visa complications, logistical concerns for re-joining the group, and increased fatigue from cumulative travel. There are many fun vacation opportunities within each region and country.

You are responsible for advising your parents/guardians about your vacation plans. You are also responsible for providing program staff with your travel destination(s) and relevant contact information. You will be given phone numbers and email addresses of the program staff in case of emergency during vacation. Understand that contact may not be immediate.

**Alumni Mentors**

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor or ask an alumni mentor: [http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/](http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/). Alumni can be a useful resource for answering your questions and providing recommendations specific to your itinerary.