Safety, Security, and Health

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Safety and Security

SIT Study Abroad places the highest priority on the safety and security of all students. SIT’s experience with and knowledge of risk assessment, emergency preparedness, and crisis management allows us to adapt quickly to dynamic challenges. Because socioeconomic, political, environmental, and medical conditions vary widely across the more than 40 countries in which SIT operates, health, safety, and security measures are specifically tailored to each location and to current circumstances.

It is important to respect local norms.

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are continuously updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. Moreover, your homestay families will help you navigate your new surroundings. They’ll provide firsthand exposure to local norms, model culturally appropriate behavior, and give you precautionary advice about the local environment. The experiential design of the academic program will also contribute to your ability to analyze your own behavior in relation to the host culture, thereby helping you make sound decisions about your safety and security.

Students are expected to adhere to all safety and security parameters as instructed by in-country staff, and to be well versed on all policies detailed in the Student Handbook. As is the case anywhere, there is much you can do on the program to ensure your own safety by simply taking responsibility for your behavior and being extra vigilant in new situations. Being careful about food and beverages, wearing appropriate clothing for the culture and climate, maintaining your wits, sound
judgment, and flexibility will go a long way toward maintaining physical and mental well-being.

**Emergency Communication**

SIT Study Abroad is available 24 hours a day to respond to and manage student emergencies. Students will be provided with local emergency contact information during in-country orientation. If you call outside of business hours, you will be greeted by an answering service and forwarded to an on-duty SIT Study Abroad staff member.

To reach SIT Study Abroad, please call (802) 258-3212 or (888) 272-7881 (toll free).

In the event of an emergency, SIT Study Abroad may inform your designated emergency contact person of what occurred. A student’s home institution may also be notified in order to facilitate the best possible support for the student and his/her family.

**US State Department**

Please make sure you review the US State Department’s Consular Information Sheet for Rwanda and Uganda. This is available at:

Rwanda: [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/rwanda.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/rwanda.html)

Uganda: [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/uganda.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/uganda.html)

Should there be developments that require program alterations, SIT Study Abroad personnel will communicate immediately with all participants regarding those proposed changes or program contingencies.

Before the program begins, SIT Study Abroad will register your participation in the program with the US State Department website designed for that purpose. **However, if you are traveling independently before or after the program, we strongly recommend that you register your travel plans.** Please go to [https://travelregistration.state.gov](https://travelregistration.state.gov) and follow the steps to register with the relevant embassy.

**Alcohol and Drug Policy**

Alcohol and drug consumption carry serious safety and legal risks, and may lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. If you choose to drink, consider there are behaviors which may be acceptable on college campuses in the United States (excessive drinking, staying out very late) which are unacceptable in Rwanda and Uganda for both safety and cultural reasons. You will be living with a family that is deeply concerned about your well-being, and you must respect this concern and their generosity in opening their home to you.

Drug use, other than for medical reasons, is strictly prohibited and is grounds for dismissal from the program. Be advised that legal penalties for drug users in many countries are severe and the authorities generally operate on a presumption of guilt. The program will be unable to assist students facing legal trouble resulting from drug use.

**General Program Tips**

Remember that while you are a student in a cultural education program in Rwanda and Uganda, you are also an ambassador for your home country, home institution, and SIT Study Abroad. We ask all students to abide by all policies and guidelines in order to help maintain those important relationships as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Failure to abide by established guidelines may result in disciplinary measures. The following are safety tips for your time on the program:

Gulu and other parts of Uganda that we visit continue to be relatively safe and secure. The long drawn out civil conflict (for over 20 years) in Northern Uganda ended in 2007. That being said, the Academic Director reserves the right to change the program itinerary as well as advise students against traveling to any part of the country if it is considered insecure at the time.

Generally, Rwandans and Ugandans are known for their hospitality and quite often will stop to greet
you, engage you in conversations and share information. However, as in any society, there is a certain amount of criminal activity. You will accordingly be advised to be conscious about your safety on the streets, especially after dark. Women wearing revealing clothes are more likely to attract unwanted attention. Students will be advised on how to handle such situations and will be expected to follow the program dress codes, safety and security guidelines.

Our homestays are carefully identified to support the program objectives relating to health, safety, and cultural immersion. Indeed, most families take this role in the program very seriously. Generally parents in both Rwanda and Uganda keep a close watch on their children and will treat you similarly. For instance, they will always want to know where their children are and at what time they will be returning home. You will be expected to abide by the house rules since you will be treated as one of their own children, and you will also be expected to regularly communicate your plans with the program staff.

Though Rwandan and Ugandan culture is ever evolving and accommodating to new influences, there remains a strong emphasis on conformity and tradition. One aspect of this is that Rwandans and Ugandans are not very tolerant of openly non-traditional lifestyles or activities which do not fit into clear male/female gender and heterosexual roles. Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda and the Ugandan Parliament has in the past considered a bill that recommends a long prison term for convicted homosexuals. It is therefore not safe for students to be open about their sexual orientations even to their homestay families. We encourage students to approach their Academic Director or program staff for support on gender and sexuality questions and concerns. A detailed discussion on safe behavior will be covered during orientation. If you have any questions regarding this matter prior to departure, please contact your admissions counselor.

Health Insurance
All SIT Study Abroad students have access to accident and sickness insurance as part of their program fee. Some features of the accident/sickness plan include:

- Emergency reunion benefits for one immediate family member
- Medical evacuation in the event of serious emergency
- Security evacuation expenses
- Lost baggage and personal property
- Repatriation and accidental death and dismemberment

Students should note that routine physicals, dental work, and other customary medical care are not covered by this plan. This plan covers accidents and sickness only. Please see our website for a full Description of Coverage and scroll down to Student Health Insurance: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/

With this insurance, you must pay for all medical expenses at the time of service and then file a claim to be reimbursed. This means that you must have funds available to you in case of emergency. It is strongly suggested that you bring a credit card, either to pay directly for medical expenses or to withdraw cash to cover medical costs in cases where credit cards are not accepted. In cases of severe medical emergencies, on-site staff will work with headquarters and the insurance company to arrange for payment. Under SIT’s insurance, expenses will be reimbursed according to the terms of coverage after the submission of the appropriate claim form.

When you pay for services rendered, make sure to request receipts that you can later submit with your insurance claim form. Most doctors will not accept credit cards so you will need to get a cash advance from the credit card to pay for the services. Some clinics and pharmacies in the bigger cities will accept credit cards.
Personal Property Insurance

Students should be aware of their environment and their belongings throughout the program, and take care to protect against theft whenever possible. Personal property and baggage insurance is included in the program fee for all study abroad program participants through SIT Study Abroad. For details on SIT’s personal property and baggage insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on this site: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/

Students whose personal property is damaged or stolen will need to complete a claim form and submit it for reimbursement. Students should note this insurance has a maximum reimbursement of $2,500 per person and reimbursement amounts take the depreciation of the item’s value into account. Aside from a personal computer, we do not encourage students to bring very expensive items to the program. If you plan to bring expensive items to the program, you may wish to consider purchasing additional insurance to cover them in the event of loss or theft. If you do experience theft or loss of items, please inform in-country program staff right away.

Please note: It’s a good idea to bring a thumb drive with you on the program. As a precaution, always be sure to back up information stored on laptops, memory drives, and digital music players. Past students have suggested making frequent backups of important documents, including assignments and ISP data. Store your backups in a separate physical location and/or online.

Health Guidelines and Requirements

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided Health Guidelines and Requirements for your program:

It is very important that you read this document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include required and recommended immunizations as specified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, and World Learning; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease. Please call your admissions counselor with any questions.

General Health Tips

Here are some important health-related tips based on past student experience:

- **Bring a full semester’s supply of important medications with you.** We realize that it may be difficult or expensive to fill a prescription for this period in advance. However, it is often impossible to send medications to program sites due to high import taxes, customs seizures, program travel, etc.

- Using physician’s letterhead stationery, have your doctor/physician write the names of your prescriptions and a description for each one. Your doctor should specify that this medication is only to be used by you and is not for sale. This note will be helpful in an emergency, and you should carry it with you while traveling, in case you are questioned by immigration authorities.

- **Important medicines should be carried on the plane with you, not in checked luggage.**

- If you are asthmatic, bring an ample supply of inhalers for the entire program, as these cannot be mailed to you from the United States.

- If you have any serious allergies, be sure to bring an epinephrine kit and an antihistamine.

http://www.sit.edu/SITStudyAbroad/health/2016SSU-ugp-health.pdf
• If you wear contact lenses, bring your own solutions. Bring a pair of glasses as a back-up; if you lose your contacts, you may have difficulty replacing them. In addition, some people find it difficult to wear contacts in a different environment.

• Please take care of all necessary dental work and allow for ample recovery time prior to your program.

For medical issues, SIT students will have access to a good private hospital recommended by our program. The program has arrangements for evacuation to Nairobi or elsewhere in the event of major trauma or illness should they occur. There are a number of good pharmacies in Kigali and Gulu that students can use.

Emotional Wellbeing
Cultural adjustment, academic challenges, a full schedule of classes, travel, field-based activities, and the dynamics of your SIT group can present new challenges to maintaining a good attitude and healthy emotional state. It is important to consider coping strategies in advance. For some students, this may mean personal journaling, exercise, music, movies, leisure reading, or coffee at your favorite café. Thinking ahead and planning for the ups and downs of your time abroad will ensure that you have the tools that you need to take good care of yourself and maintain a positive outlook.

If you have used counseling services on a regular basis, SIT advises that you discuss this program with your mental health professional as early as possible prior to departure. In some cases, students have elected to maintain a phone or email relationship with a provider in the US, though the practicalities of time differences and program demands may make such an arrangement difficult to maintain on a regular basis.

Mental health services are available at Makerere University Hospital in Uganda.

WHO Card
The International Certificate of Vaccination (also known as the WHO card) is a card used to record medical information such as immunizations and other medical history. You must obtain a blank WHO card at a Travel Clinic or online at: http://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf. Please consult your physician to ensure that your WHO card accurately reflects your Immunization Record. Refer to the Health Guidelines and Requirements document for required and recommended immunizations for your program.

The International Certificate of Vaccination - also known as the WHO card

All students should travel with an up-to-date WHO card regardless of whether there are required immunizations for your program at this time. Countries, or localities within countries, may change immunization requirements at any time, so it is important that you have this document available. Without this proof of immunization history, you may be denied entry to certain countries/areas. We recommend keeping your WHO card with your passport and other
important documents, as well as making a photocopy that you keep separately.