



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

Senegal: Global Security and Religious Pluralism

Spring 2020

SIT Study Abroad
School for International Training



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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Senegal is located on the Atlantic coast of West Africa, at the western-most point of the African mainland. In 1960, the country's population was just over three million inhabitants. Today, that number has quintupled and is growing increasingly younger, with 42% of the population under 15 years of age and 50% under 20. It is also estimated that 38% of the population is urban.

Of the country's 15 million inhabitants, about 48% are Wolof, 17% are Serere and 11% are Pulaar/Fulani. The rest of the population is composed of thirty other ethnic groups, such as the Diola, Mandinka and Soninke. An important number of expatriates from Europe and North America, and other African countries live in Senegal as well.

Senegal's population is approximately 95% Muslim, 4 % Christian and 1% animist. Yet, most Muslims and Christians also follow, albeit privately, some animist traditions. This is so pervasive that Leopold Sedar Senghor once claimed that in Senegal, we are 90% Muslim, 10% Catholic and 100% Animist. It is therefore just normal that religious pluralism is one of the foundations of the Senegalese culture.

Archeological findings throughout the area indicate that Senegal was inhabited in prehistoric times. Islam established itself along the Senegal River in the 11th century. Europeans started settling later, in the 15th century. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to trade in Senegal, followed by the Dutch and the French. In the 19th century, the French gradually occupied and administered the interior regions and in 1920, Dakar was the capital of all French West Africa. After the 1958 French constitutional referendum, Senegal became a member of the French community with virtually complete internal autonomy.

Senegal gained access to independence in 1960. Leopold Sédar Senghor, a world-renowned poet, politician and philosopher was elected as Senegal's first president in September of the same year. He remained in power until

1980. After his resignation on December 31, 1980, Abdou Diouf became the second president of the young country. The new president encouraged broader political participation, reduced government involvement in the economy, and widened Senegal's diplomatic engagements, particularly with other developing nations. Abdoulaye Wade, Diouf's longtime opponent, was elected president in March of 2000 after a run-off with Diouf. He was reelected again in February of 2007. The 2012 elections brought Macky Sall as the most recent president.



CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Senegal is mainly a low-lying country, with a semi-desert area in the north and the east, forests in the south and the Savana in the center. Two well-defined dry and humid seasons result from northeast winter winds and southwest summer winds. The climate is pleasantly tropical with Dakar ranking as one of the coolest, breeziest spots in West Africa. The country's daily temperatures range from 18° C (65° F) and 31° C (87° F) depending on the season. In the north and central parts, the rainy season lasts from July to October. Rainfall averages range from 300mm (12in) in the north to as much as six times that in the south; Dakar gets over 600mm (24in) of rain annually. The dry season, which makes up the rest of the year, tends to be very

hot and arid in regions like Tambacounda, Matam and Kédougou, except in the coastal regions such as Dakar, Thies, Saint Louis, and Mbour where the temperature and the humidity are modified by ocean breezes.

Average Dakar maximum and minimum temperatures in Fahrenheit:

Dakar: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
77-63	77-63	77-64	79-68
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
86-75	86-75	84-73	81-68

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Greetings

Greetings are the most important aspect of Senegalese etiquette. Most people greet each other with the consecrated Muslim formula: “Asalaamu Aleykum,” (“May peace be upon you”) or “na nga def?” It is also customary to shake his/her hands especially if you are greeting one or a couple of people.

Sense of politeness

Politeness is very important to Senegalese people. As mentioned above, greetings are one of the most essential ways to show it. Here are some other ways politeness can be shown: using only your right hand when you eat or pass items to people, learning people’s names, removing shoes when entering someone’s living room, especially if there is a mat or a rug, and walking your guests all the way to the sidewalk when it comes time for them to leave.

Personal space

Be ready for people to ask personal questions and to be blunt about your appearance. Senegalese people are not afraid to show physical affection and have a different understanding of personal space. There are instances, however, when being aware of personal space is important. For example, when people are praying,

walking right in front of them should be avoided. At the same time, it is usually off-putting when someone gets close to animals and, as a rule, petting or cuddling animals should be avoided.

DIET

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

The richness of the Senegalese cuisine finds its virtue in the *ganale*, meaning the art of welcoming, a tradition that obliges special attention to the preparation of dishes. It is a matter of honor for Senegalese to give their guest a meal of quality. Most Senegalese families will offer a rich variety of foods like the national dish *ceeb-u-jen* (fish and rice), *yassa poulet* (plain rice with onion sauce and chicken), *maafé* (rice and lamb or beef with peanut sauce/veggies), or *thiou* (rice and fish or meat with onions and tomato paste). Depending on the family, millet couscous will be served for dinner on Fridays. In Dakar, French fries will sometimes be served with meat and lettuce. For vegetarians, most dishes are cooked with several vegetables such as carrots, cassava, eggplant, sweet potato, cabbage, and green beans. For vegans, the protein supplement can be in the form of local beans called *niebé*. Vegetables are available all year round in Dakar.

Meals are generally served around 1:00 pm for lunch and at 8:30pm/9:00pm for dinner. Meals are frequently followed by the traditional Senegalese tea called *Ataaya*,

or local juices such as *bissap*, ginger, tamarind, and *bouye* (fruit of the baobab). Fruits are also available all year round.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. It is therefore very important that you read the [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; as well as valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

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, accident and illness insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

HOMESTAYS



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 commit to moving beyond cultural barriers.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, so 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 students’ arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

Your main homestay will be in Dakar where the program is based.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

During excursions you will be housed in hotels, local inns and encampments (hotels which mimic the design of compounds found in the rural areas).

TRANSPORTATION

Most students use public transportation such as the *Car Rapide*, the white minibus known as *Ndiaga Njaay*, or busses called “TATAS”. Taxis are also common in the cities and are very reasonable as a mode of transportation. On program excursions, we will travel as a group on a tour bus.

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.

PHONES, INTERNET, AND COMPUTER USE

SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose students are required to either: (a) bring an unlocked smartphone, (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, or (c) bring a smartphone with an international plan. During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their local cell phone. While we recognize that alternative communication methods such as Facetime, Skype, and WhatsApp, can be cheaper than traditional cellular phone services, those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

For students who choose to purchase a cell phone in Senegal, costs run from 13,000 CFA (US\$30) to 400,000 CFA (US\$850). The SIM card and units can cost between 1,000 CFA (US\$3) to 25,000 CFA (US\$55).

Wireless internet access is available free at the SIT Senegal office. Since wireless connections are getting better in Dakar, using internet to contact your family and friends may be the most reliable solution. In fact, the best and least expensive way to communicate with people back home is via the internet, through apps such as Skype, Facebook messenger, or WhatsApp. To access the internet outside of SIT, you can purchase a certain amount of gigabytes of internet along with minutes on your phone or buy a wireless modem. Some host

families may have wireless internet at home, but this is not guaranteed.

There are no computers or printers available at the SIT Senegal office for student use. Therefore, you should seriously consider bringing your own laptop computer, which will be useful during the program, especially for the ISP/internship period. However, SIT does not assume any responsibility for any related expenses, loss, damage, or theft of student computers. There is a place where you can store your computer at SIT or you can keep it at your homestay. Most students say having their computer was essential to their ISP/internship. We're finding that most students are bringing their own computers each semester. You should bring a USB drive and plan on frequently backing up your data. Lastly, you will need to use printing shops for all of your printing needs.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **difficult**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Sending valuables is highly discouraged.

DHL and FedEx services are a good alternative to the traditional mail services. Reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised given the frequency of delays and unreliability once packages arrive in Senegal. Posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
c/o SIT – Study Abroad Senegal
BP: 16490 CP 10700
Dakar - Senegal

MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover excursions and activities that

are part of the normal program itinerary. During the ISP/internship period, students will receive a stipend for basic room and board only, based on the cost of living at the program base. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP or internship are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

Senegal's currency is known as the Franc CFA (pronounced Céfa), which is also used by seven other countries in West Africa and six in Central Africa. Although the West African CFA has the same value as the Central African CFA, the two are not interchangeable. The West African CFA can only be used in the West African countries in the CFA zone and vice versa.

It is advisable to bring your funds in various forms so that if there is a problem with one option you will still have access to your money. ATM cards are easy to use in Dakar and other cities and are the preferred choice for accessing funds - but remember that there is often a fee (around US\$1.75-US\$5.00) each time you withdraw money. Make sure to bring some cash with you to start off with, around US\$100 dollars. A Visa credit card or a MasterCard card is very useful for emergencies. Cash advances can be obtained in Dakar using a Visa credit

card or a MasterCard, but the exchange rate will be high. It is extremely difficult to wire money to Senegal so be sure to have other means of accessing cash for the entire program. It is recommended to not bring traveler's checks, as they are difficult to exchange. Make sure all your ATM cards are issued a PIN to avoid theft.

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.

The following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. 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 ranges from **US\$1400 to \$1900**. 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 travel costs for your planned ISP, internship or a specific personal expense.

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$350-850
Books, printing, supplies:	\$150
Up-front medical costs:	\$400
Potential ISP/internship travel expenses:	\$300
Internet and phone costs:	\$200
Estimated total:	\$1400-1900



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 section of the [Student Handbook](#).

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 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 and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP and internship. 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. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

Students may NOT leave the country during the program period and all travel away from the program site needs to be approved by the AD.

Further details regarding the independent travel policy can be found in the [Student Handbook](#).

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. Most students find that a large internal frame backpack and a smaller daypack/duffel are the most convenient choice of luggage. Some students choose to bring a suitcase; however, you should also have a smaller bag to use for excursions and for carrying your books and personal items. In most cases, you will find that you can store your larger piece of luggage at your homestay during the program. When packing, don't forget to include flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor. This is the best preparation for the time ahead.



Do not forget to put some toiletries (small bottles) and a week's worth of clothing in your carry on in case your luggage gets delayed. This happens quite often on international routes.

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

The clothes that you bring should be hand washable, breathable, and preferably drip-dry cotton and cotton-blends. Fashion in Senegal is fairly cosmopolitan. Do not bring sloppy clothes or clothes with immodest pictures or writings. Revealing clothing and very informal clothing are discouraged. Jeans, t-shirts, blouses and tank tops are fine. Avoid crop tops, low-riding pants, and very short skirts; use your own judgment for wardrobe choices, keeping in mind that you will be in a more or less conservative place, although Dakar is also a 21st century city.

The emphasis should be on neat. Bring clothes that look nice but will not cause you to be disappointed if they become faded, worn, or lost. A couple of long-sleeved shirts may be useful for evening protection against mosquitoes as well as for cooler temperatures during the early spring and late fall. You may want to bring some evening clothes for the dance clubs. You can always buy and/or have made any new clothing you need once you are in Senegal.

EQUIPMENT

You may bring double bed sheets and pillowcases if you need them, or you can buy all those items in country at reasonable prices.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft. SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country or for any theft or loss of your belongings.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>. Do not bring any electrical appliances without the proper voltage converters. The standard voltage in Senegal is 220-240 volts AC. This means that your 110 voltage electronic equipment (other than a laptop and your smartphone or tablet) will either overheat or burn out unless you use it with a converter. For all electronic equipment, you will need an adapter to fit into Senegalese electric outlets. We suggest a power strip that can serve multiple plugs.

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.

For your homestays practical gifts have made nice gifts for families. Do not bring magnets as they will not be relevant to the children in your family.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Soap, shampoo, toothpaste (including several U.S. brands), pens, pencils, notebooks and school supplies are available in most big cities. Laundry will be done by hand in your homestay, but if you decide to do your own laundry, small packets of laundry detergent are available at little shops nearby. One can generally obtain most toiletries and cleaning supplies in the larger cities, usually at a higher price. Certain items or brands will be difficult to find in the smaller villages. Refer to the packing list.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/>.

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

PACKING LIST

GENERAL

- 1 or 2 pair dress shoes
- Supportive tennis shoes or comfortable sandals (for walking in sand & some hiking)
- Sturdy Flip-flops or other casual indoor shoes
- A few long-sleeved shirts for protection from mosquitoes in evening/early morning and cooler temperatures
- Cotton underwear (two weeks' supply)
- 2 'workout' outfits (could include T-shirt/Conservative shorts for jogging/sports/dance class)
- Lightweight raincoat - folds up small but covers as much as possible (July-October)
- Sturdy umbrella or light raincoat for the rainy season (July-October)
- Lightweight sweater or jacket for cooler temperatures (November-May)
- Dressy clothing for meeting with professionals, ISP interviews, etc. (can also be made locally)
- Water bottle

WOMEN

- 3-4 skirts and/or 1-2 dresses (not too short)
- 2-3 pairs of lightweight pants, lightweight blouses with short sleeves, t-shirts, or tank tops – necklines should be somewhat conservative, midriffs covered (one to two weeks' supply)
- Bathing suit (should not be too revealing)
- 1 outfit for going out at night (optional)
- Scarf or head covering for visiting mosque (can also be purchased locally)
- 1-2 sports bras for workouts; running pants that fall below knees

MEN

- 3-5 pairs of lightweight pants (jeans are fine)
- 3-5 shirts (take into consideration that sleeveless shirts are less commonly worn)
- 3-5 T-shirts (should be neat with no offensive writing or pictures)
- Bathing suit
- 1 pair of conservative shorts or sweatpants for hiking or sports

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card where applicable
- Two photocopies of your passport, stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (*if applicable*)

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Prescription medications used regularly plus a copy of the prescription
- Over-the-counter medications, as approved by your doctor (many of these are available in Dakar): pain reliever/fever reducer, cold medication/decongestant, cough suppressant (NOT available in Senegal), laxative, anti-diarrheal medication (such as Imodium), travel sickness medication
- Vitamin supplements (available locally, but expensive)
Note: Even if you don't take them regularly, you might consider taking them in Senegal given the substantial changes in diet.
- Gatorade or equivalent, in powder form
- Good quality thermometer (for taking your temperature)
- Small first aid kit
- Medicated powder (especially in the fall semester's humid weather)
- Sunscreen/Solarcaine spray, Aloe for sunburn cream
- A good supply of Band-Aids/antiseptic/antibacterial ointments
- Mosquito net (can easily be purchased in Dakar for \$10)
- Mosquito repellent with 20-30% DEET for use on skin and up to 100% DEET for clothing
- (Permethrin) for use on clothing
- **MALARIA PROPHYLAXIS** - Bring enough for the entire period. Please consult your physician for the number of pills needed and the type of malaria prophylaxis that is best for you.
- Contact lens solution (difficult to find and expensive in Dakar)
- Tampons or sanitary napkins (available but generally more expensive)
- Deodorant

- Hand sanitizer (available locally)
- Moistened towelettes (e.g. wet wipes or body wipes)
- Towel (quick-dry towels have been recommended)
- Dental floss

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Good quality, small locks (for luggage)
- Daypack or book/shoulder bag, backpack or similar for school
- Journal
- Pens, pencils, school supplies (available in Dakar)
- Double bed sheet, pillowcase
- Extra pair of glasses/contacts (if you wear them)
- Ziploc bags (a few) of different sizes, sharpies
- Army knife with bottle opener
- **Flashlight or headlamp** (small with extra bulb) and good quality batteries
- Extra batteries for all electronic items (note: AAA batteries are hard to find; AA easy to find, but expensive)
- French/English dictionary (small)
- Photos of your family and friends; small portable book about your state
- Homestay gifts
- UV water purifier e.g. SteriPEN (not necessary but helpful so you don't have to buy bottled water)
- Small shower caddy for toiletries in homestay (can get locally)

OPTIONAL

- Books to read (and share)
- Sunglasses (also available locally)