

kribi

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

& PACKING GUIDELINES

Cameroon: Development and Social Change
Spring 2024

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Cameroon is home to over 200 ethnic and language groups and is often referred to as “Africa in Miniature” because of its diversity. Cameroon’s official languages are French and English, a product of a partition after World War I that resulted in Cameroon being split between the French and the English. French Cameroon gained its independence in 1960 and a year later, English-speaking Cameroon merged with it to form present-day Cameroon.

Since its independence, Cameroon has gone from a federal state to a highly centralized unitary presidential republic and then to a democratic state. A president, assisted by a prime minister, heads the executive branch of the government, and there is a judiciary and legislative branch closely tied to the executive power. Cameroon has had two presidents since independence: Amadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya. Several political parties exist in the country and are represented in parliament, but the Cameroon People’s Democratic Party (CPDM) is the most dominant entity.

The country has long been among the few peaceful states in the central part of the African continent. The president of Cameroon strives to preserve peace in the country and in 2008 succeeded in calming down a transportation strike joined by many Cameroonians requesting a change in power and a better economic life. The current political climate is dominated by the government’s efforts to improve Cameroonians’ quality of life and reduce corruption. Security forces are preserving peace.

For most of the 20th century, the economy of Cameroon was based on agriculture, but it has gradually shifted towards mining and industrialization. The drop in commodity prices for its principal exports – oil, cocoa, coffee, and cotton – in the mid-1980s, combined with an overvalued currency and economic

WEST PROVINCE: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
85/67	85/67	85/67	85/66	83/67
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
81/66	81/65	83/66	83/66	

mismanagement, led to a severe economic crisis. This resulted in the 1994 devaluation of the local currency which, contrary to expectations, worsened the living conditions of Cameroonians. To help improve the situation, the World Bank, the IMF, and the government have implemented several economic reform programs.



CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Cameroon has mountains, volcanic highlands, coastal plains, jungles, rivers, rain forests, and savanna. This very diverse topography also has distinct climates. The coast has high temperatures and humidity throughout the year, and one point on Mt. Cameroon has the second-highest rainfall – 1,150 cm. (460 in.) – in the world.

The northwest has high altitudes and cool weather. In Yaoundé, where the program is

based, the climate is quite pleasant – warm to hot in the daytime and comfortable in the evenings. Please note, however, that temperatures during excursion in the western province can become very chilly (in the 50s), especially during the rainy season. The rainy season is from March to November, and the dry season is thus November to March. It follows that there is dust in the dry season and mud in the rainy season.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Below are some cultural dos and don'ts to respect in Cameroon, but it is important to keep in mind that the list is incomplete and only presents some of the most common occurrences.

In some areas of Cameroon, most gatherings, whether social or work-related, will begin with prayer. Greetings are very important in the culture.

Elders are respected and not called by their given names. Familial words such as *momma*, *mommy*, *pa*, *petit frère*, *ton ton*, *tata*, etc. are used to show respect. Handshaking is a normal greeting, but not everyone will. Avoid giving or accepting things using the left hand. Most Cameroonians do not look you in the eye when talking to you. Doing this to an elder would be considered disrespectful. Crossing legs is a sign of superiority and therefore not respectful.

People dress up to go out in public – better late than dirty! Being late is accepted. In fact, expect it! Carry something to occupy your mind when waiting. Be very, very, very patient. Cameroonians have been doing the same things in the same way for many generations. Don't expect to change the entire society. Privacy and anonymity are scarce in this culture, so be prepared to give up some personal space.

Most Cameroonians believe there is no such thing as a platonic relationship between a man and a woman. Men here are assertive. Many single, female Americans say they have a "husband" to avoid discussions about relationships. Some even go so far as wearing a wedding ring. Visits from someone of the

opposite sex after dark imply a sexual relationship. Keep the door open. Kissing is not done in public.

Older women wear mostly skirts and dresses but younger women can wear trousers provided they are not too revealing. There are set gender roles in Cameroon and women usually hold traditional roles (secretary, cooking, child care etc.). Food is believed to taste better when prepared by the women you love and eaten together. It is rare to see a woman smoke in public, let alone at all. This also includes going to a bar or dance hall alone.

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 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.

Meals in Cameroon usually consist of a starchy staple such as rice, yam, couscous, or plantains and a sauce. Popular sauces include leaf, okra, and tomato cooked with some meat or fish in palm oil at times. Meat is rarely the focus of the meal; however, there is usually a small amount in the sauce. Maintaining a vegetarian diet can be somewhat challenging in Cameroon. During group activities and excursions, the program will make an effort to have vegetarian options available; however, this may not always be possible. Vegetarian meals are rare, meaning that it will be difficult to remain a strict vegetarian in Cameroon. If you are less strict, then it is

recommended that you reacquaint your body with meat or fish before you arrive in country. We do ask hosts and caterers to help provide vegetarian meals, but you should understand that the concept of vegetarianism is still new. With this in mind, the flexible vegetarian should be able to manage in Cameroon.

Here are a few suggestions regarding food. People might be offended if you refuse food or drinks. Smelling the food before eating is not generally done. Don't waste food; if you can't eat it or don't want to, give it to another who will. Say *bon appetit* or simply *appetit* before you begin eating and when it is said to you, reply with *merci* or *thank you*.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

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 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; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

SIT no longer requires vaccination to participate on programs except for locations where host country governments require it.

However, we strongly encourage students to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 per CDC recommendations. SIT continues to closely monitor COVID-19 conditions in each program location and will advise students on any location-specific COVID-19 requirements and regulations prior to and during their program.

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](#).

ACCOMMODATIONS

You will stay with a Cameroonian family, in Yaounde and in Batoufam. Classes will be held both at the program center in Bastos and in conference rooms when we are on excursions. When in Yaounde, and Batoufam, your homestay will provide two meals, and you will receive a stipend for lunch. When on excursion, the program staff will provide all three meals. During orientation and some excursions, you will be housed in hostels that have been approved by your academic director. These hostels are expected to meet basic standards for hygiene and service but you should not expect U.S. hotel standards here. You will arrange your own accommodations during the ISP/internship period with the approval of the academic director and the



aid of the local staff. Hostels and local inns are not available options during your ISP/internship.

TRANSPORTATION

In Yaoundé, most Cameroonians get around by using taxis. You will make your way to and from class on your own. Walking is the best option but you can also use taxis. Use of motorbike taxis is prohibited. During excursions, we will use cars rented by the program or we may walk.

COMMUNICATION

Internet availability has made communication easier, however, 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. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

PHONES AND E-MAIL

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 wifi. If needed, during orientation SIT Study Abroad staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting.

Most students purchase a cell phone upon arrival in Cameroon. They cost between US\$30 and US\$60. If you already have a GSM phone, you might be able to just change the SIM card while you are here, but it may be more cost-effective to purchase a local cell phone. Cell phones function on a pay-as-you-go basis. You recharge the phone when you want and get charged only when you place a call, never when you receive one. You can also buy internet data via your phone and share internet on your computer. During the fall semester, the time difference between Cameroon and the U.S. (East Coast) is six hours. In the spring, it decreases to five hours.

There are a couple of computers at the program office that you can use during work hours but usage is restricted to word processing. Internet access is available in the office for academic research only; we do not encourage students to



use the Internet in the office as it reduces their experience of the community services.

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.

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.

Posted letters should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
c/o The School for International Training
BP 33241
Yaoundé, Cameroon

If it is necessary for someone to send you a package, it should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
(Telephone number of student)
c/o The School for International Training
BP 33241
Yaoundé, Cameroon

Please note that SIT is updating lease agreements. This address is subject to change.

DHL or other private carriers may need a residential street address. Please call the

student affairs office at 802-258-3212 for specific address information if this is the case.

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 daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions 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/internship are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

Cameroon's currency is known as the Franc CFA (pronounced Céfa), which is also used by five other countries in Central Africa and eight countries in West Africa. Although the Central African CFA has the same value as the West African CFA, the two are not interchangeable. The Central African CFA can only be used in the Central African countries in the CFA zone and vice versa. Please bring your money in various forms such as cash and debit and/or credit cards for emergencies. This is so that if there is a problem with one option you will still have access to money. You can take out up to US\$300 at a time with VISA cards only. You must have your PIN in order to use a debit card or take out a cash advance. While it is easy to take out cash at a bank with your credit card/debit card/ATM card, credit cards are not accepted as payment in most parts of Cameroon. Cash is used for most daily transactions and the use of checks, traveler's checks, and credit/debit cards for direct purchases is rare.

Some students also have their parents send them money via Western Union. It is very easy, reliable, and fast, and there are various Western Union locations throughout Cameroon. You can easily exchange Euros and U.S. dollars. A money belt large enough to hold your passport is useful. The Academic Director will allow you to keep some of your money in the safe in the office if you want; you will need to arrange that with him when you arrive. Bring many numerical locks and at least a bag whose contents cannot be accessed when locked.

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.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP/internship-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**.

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/>

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$500
Printing, supplies:	\$100
Up-front medical costs:	\$300
Potential ISP/internship travel expenses:	\$100
COVID-19 Test(s) (may be required for entry; subject to change and costs may vary)	\$100-250
Internet key and Phone:	\$200
Tourist sites:	\$100
Miscellaneous:	\$50-\$100
Estimated total:	\$1450- \$1650

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 accommodation locations or homestay families can accommodate only students and, due to cultural and contractual understandings, 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/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.

If a student chooses to travel independently, they must have their independent travel approved in advance and they will be required to follow established independent travel protocols. Independent travel requests for in-country destinations may be authorized under the following conditions: a) the independent travel request is submitted consistent with the process steps detailed in the Independent Travel Policy, to include submission of a detailed travel itinerary/lodging information within the

proscribed timeframe so that a proper review can occur with the Academic Director and the Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing Regional Manager. Note: "Independent Travel" is defined as travel within the host country that: a) occurs during the program's defined enrollment period; b) is independently organized by a student; c) is unrelated to program activities; d) does not interfere with scheduled program activities; and e) involves an overnight stay. 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. Backpacks are easier to manipulate and carry. We recommend you use backpacks and get numerical locks for each of them.

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 all be washable and breathable and preferably drip-dry cotton and cotton-blends. Do not bring sloppy clothes or clothes with immodest pictures or writing on them. Revealing clothing and very informal clothing, such as tank tops, are not acceptable. Dark-colored clothing is preferred because of dust or mud. All clothing should be modest: tops should cover shoulders and waists (no tank tops, crop tops, or bikinis); skirts and shorts should be at knee level or below knees; clothing should not be see-through; and plunging necklines are not acceptable.

Night temperatures tend to drop at higher elevations. Therefore you will need a sweater, light coat or jacket, and waterproof rainwear. Remember, you have to hand-wash everything; key words to keep in mind when selecting clothing are: clean, neat, in good condition,

presentable, comfortable, and conservative. Plan on a combination of casual and somewhat dressy (one or two items). You will spend most of your time in cosmopolitan Yaoundé – don’t be afraid to look nice. Most students get a lot of local clothing made for them while they are in Cameroon.

Buy all the items in the packing list in the U.S. It is usually cheaper, more easily available, and of better quality. Remember, you can have clothes made with local fabric in Cameroon and most students usually take advantage of this. In addition to being a sign of integration, clothes are cheap and pretty. Please buy formal shoes; wearing flip flops out of the house is not respectful, and students are not allowed to come to class in flip flops. Sandals with straps at the back can be worn and are accepted anywhere.

Dressing could be more formal depending on the places or ceremonies you go to, or less formal if staying at home.

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.

Some suggestions are: flashlights, music in the form of CDs or DVDs, lipstick or nail polish, perfumes, glow in the dark stars, T-shirts with logos, shirts, purses, baseball hats with logos, small photo albums with pictures of your family/state and some blank pages in which to insert pictures you might take with your homestay families, and a book with pictures of your state or the U.S. in general.

For kids: small toys and games, stickers, inexpensive watercolors, crayons, coloring books, or other school supplies (interesting products, book bags, pencils, pens), T-shirts with logos; fairly simple novels or children's books (in English), dictionaries, and candy or other American edibles. As a general rule, bring a wide range of gifts for a wide range of ages, because you will not know the age of your family members ahead of time. You will have a total of three or four homestay families, and they all tend to be very different experiences.

EQUIPMENT

We highly recommend that you bring a mosquito net with an internal frame and floor, a digital recorder for your Independent Study Project (ISP) and a flash drive. Please see the detailed packing list below for more information.

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 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, theft, or loss.

Our office in Yaoundé has wireless access but it can be very slow at times. We also have desktop computers available for student use during office hours. However, in order to prepare for ISP/internship, we encourage students to use cyber cafes in town; they cost around US \$1 an

hour. Please remember that computers and other electronics are considered valuable in Cameroon and might put you at risk. Please note that it is not possible to rent computers in Cameroon.

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

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

You can generally obtain most of these items in the larger cities, (except for mosquito nets with an internal frame and floor) but usually at a higher price. Additionally, you will not always be in the places where you can get these items, and specific brands may not be available. Remember that you will be responsible for doing your own laundry, which is commonly done by hand in Cameroon. Washing machines or laundromats are not commonly available.

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!

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

PACKING LIST

GENERAL

- 2 pairs of jeans
- 3-5 pairs of lightweight pants or skirts
- 4-6 shirts or light blouses
- Bathing suit and 2 travel towels
- Sweater or Jacket
- 1-2 long sleeve shirts to wear with your sweater or jacket when it is cool
- 2 dressy outfits, for meetings and interviews
- Light raincoat
- 1 pair of nice shoes, tennis shoes and walking sandals (Not flip-flops), 1 pair of flip-flops for showers
- Underwear (2-3 week supply)
- Dark colored socks



TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card/International Certificate of Prophylaxis (see the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document for more information)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- COVID-19 vaccination card encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Over-the-counter medications as approved by your doctor:
 - Pain reliever/fever reducer

- Cold medication/decongestant
- Laxative
- Anti-diarrheal medication such as Imodium
- Travel sickness medication
- Anti-itch cream for mosquito bites
- Good quality thermometer (for taking your temperature - required)
- Small first aid kit
- Sunscreen/solarcaine spray (sunscreen is not widely available)
- Mosquito repellent w/ 20-30% DEET for use on skin and up to 100% DEET (permethrin) for use on clothing
- Vitamin supplements (if you take them)
- Probiotic, esp if you are taking doxycycline
- Water disinfectant tablets (1 bottle) or iodine, for travel in rural areas where bottled water is not available
- Malaria prophylaxis – bring enough for the entire semester! Please consult your physician for the number of pills needed and the type of malaria prophylaxis that is best for you.
- Tampons or sanitary napkins (consider bringing enough for the entire semester; they are available, but not in all sizes/types and they are expensive)
- Contact solution, if you use it (enough for the entire semester)
- Hand sanitizer

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Numerical locks for your bags
- Laptop computer
- Sturdy folding umbrella (especially fall semester)
- Mosquito net (the kind that is freestanding with an internal frame is highly recommended; if you have trouble finding one, Travel Medicine, Inc., Long Road, and REI have several good models)
- Flashlight (small with extra bulb)
- Extra batteries for all electronic items
- French/English dictionary (small)
- LifeStraw Go Water Bottle with Integrated 1000-Liter LifeStraw Filter

- Money belt
- Flash drive
- Digital recorder
- Headlamp
- Raincoat waterproof

OPTIONAL

- Ziploc bags (a few)
- Alarm clock (battery operated or other non-electric portable)
- Foam pad or sleeping mat
- Extra pair of glasses/contacts, if you wear them

