



Focus on SOUTH AFRICA School Program

"My year in South Africa gave me a chance to start over; to remove all the things I thought were so right and to discover a totally new world--from the simplest and smallest things."

Cecilia Rezaval, participant from Argentina

South Africa's passion for nature preservation dates back to 1898 when the government established the forerunner of today's Kruger National Park, the continent's oldest safari preserve, where visitors can see all of Africa's most popular animals. By contrast, the government is striving to erase any legacy of apartheid, the obsolete social policy that suppressed South Africa's native black majority and gave power to immigrant Europeans. Though South Africa still struggles with social and economic disparities, opinion polls reflect widespread optimism that integration is headed in the right direction. The challenge remains daunting, however. South Africans, who speak 11 different official languages (one of which is English), include nine black ethnic groups, Europeans, Malays, Indians and Chinese. In today's Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city, stock traders leave their glass-and-steel offices talking on cell phones and pass medicine shops selling jars of lizards' feet and crocodile fat. South Africans come together, though, in a pan-cultural enthusiasm for soccer.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS was first established in South Africa in 1958. During the difficult years of apartheid, AFS South Africa provided opportunities to young people of all cultural groups. In 1989, it was renamed AFS Interculture South Africa. It is now one of the few African AFS partners, annually hosting more than 100 AFS students and 60 community services program participants from as many as 30 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in South Africa

You will arrive in Johannesburg, where AFS Interculture South Africa staff or volunteers will bring you to your first South African orientation.

Orientation

The two-to-three day arrival orientation, held in Johannesburg, will be a chance to discuss everyone's expectations, South African cultural topics and issues of safety and security, while meeting other AFSers with whom you will share your experience. Activities will include icebreaking games, cultural activities and an obstacle course.

If your host family lives near Johannesburg, they will pick you up after the orientation. Otherwise, you will travel by bus or plane to your local chapter where your host family and volunteers will meet you.

Living in South Africa

Lifestyle and Family Living

Throughout its history, South Africa has been a geographic designation rather than a reflection of national unity. The country has a complex and diversified mix of populations represented by a mosaic of minorities, each proud of its language, traditions and religious beliefs. Defining subgroups by skin color only gets you into trouble: those of British descent and Afrikaners (descended from early Dutch settlers, who feel highly committed to South Africa) are white but dislike being confused with one another. The Zulu, with the strongest surviving indigenous black culture, and the Xhosa, known as the "red people" from the red-dyed clothing worn by most adults, feel the same way. A related group is the Ndebele known for their strikingly painted houses. There is also a small but influential Jewish population and a significant Indian minority that first immigrated in the 1860s.

The population diversity is also reflected in the diversity of host families, which can differ one from the other in language, race, culture and religion. It is therefore hard to identify a single lifestyle, although families are generally warm and curious about visitors. It is common in South Africa to hug and show your feelings, talk sincerely but remain polite and concerned about moral behavior. South African society is generally conservative, valuing a commitment to family, and a vast percentage of the population is active in one of the many religions.

South African families may differ in cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but, like all AFS host families worldwide, South African host families are not paid. They open their homes to AFS participants in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Unlike in many countries, in South Africa AFSers are most often placed in an urban environment (80%), rather than in suburban (15%) or rural (5%) one.

Dress and Appearance

Teenage dressing habits in South Africa are very close to western standards, but keep South Africa's conservative culture in mind. Jeans, T-shirts, shorts and sweatshirts will probably be what you will wear the most after school. In school, you will wear a uniform.

Diets and Meals

As the Marketing Department of the Meat Board once wrote, "South Africans are a meat-eating nation." Steak or *boerewors* sausage, boiled veggies and chips are standard fare. One delicacy South Africans are particularly proud of is *biltong*. *Biltong* is South African dried meat: the word comes from Dutch "bil" meaning buttock and "tong" meaning strip. It is of course of Afrikaans heritage. Other food customs vary according to ethnicity. African dishes are more a home cuisine than a restaurant cuisine, and many are influenced by the British heritage.

School Life

The school system in South Africa has changed during the past decade along with the realities that once included segregation with many only white, black and colored schools. The government is well aware of the fundamental role of education and recognizes it as one of the most important long-term investments a country can make. Because of this, the education budget has increased significantly, giving South Africa one of the world's highest rates of government investment in education.

Schools in South Africa are strict and challenging. Students wear uniforms, and teachers command respect (students stand when teachers enter the room, and address them as "Madam" or "Sir"). AFS students are expected to participate fully, to do all homework assignments and take all exams. You may be placed in a once traditionally black, white or colored school, consistent with your host-family setting. You can obtain a transcript and/or certificate of attendance if you attend classes regularly, complete the coursework and pass the examinations.

You may arrive halfway through the school year and attend the last or second-to-last year of high school. There is a school holiday for 10 days from late September to early October. Summer break is from the beginning of December to the beginning of January, and Easter holidays last three weeks in March/April. Classes are from Monday to Friday.

Schools offer many activities that you can participate in after classes: they may be sports such as swimming, tennis, rugby, cricket or hockey or other activities including theater courses, choir, music or chess.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS South Africa will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

A Local Chapter Cultural Orientation is held about 20 days after the Arrival Orientation, where you will discuss in more detail issues regarding your particular area. At a Mid-Year Orientation, you will participate in social and cultural activities as well as share your experiences and provide feedback.

In addition to other events that your local volunteers may organize, AFS Interculture South Africa will organize the so called End-of-Stay orientation: a two-to-three day gathering before your departure. It will be held in Johannesburg, where you will have a chance to evaluate your experience in South Africa and think about the future, as well as sharing your experience with other AFSers.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in South Africa, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS South Africa. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Due to South Africa's great diversity, you may find yourself in unusual social situations that will teach you to live within acceptable limits in terms of how you spend your money. South African young people are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to join. When you do things on your own such as visiting friends or shopping for yourself, the expenses are your responsibility. AFS recommends that US\$1,000 in traveler's checks should be sufficient to meet a year's worth of spending needs.

Safety and Support

Security is an issue in South Africa. It is important that you pay attention to the advice given by your host families and AFS Interculture South Africa.

South Africans are aware of the dangers; that is why they are protective of their children. They may get anxious if you do not obey the basic rules. If you listen to the advice of people in your community, your family and AFS Interculture South Africa, you should be safe.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a South African. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS South Africa may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for South Africa (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help you find it. As an AFS participant, your medical

expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

The Republic of South Africa occupies the southernmost part of the African continent, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west and the Indian Ocean on the east. Its northern boundaries are with Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, while Mozambique and the kingdom of Swaziland lie on the northeast. Completely enclosed by South Africa is the mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. About the size of Peru, South Africa is defined mostly by the internal plateau, which is divided from the coastlands by a mountain range called the Great Escarpment, the most prominent and continuous relief feature in the country.

The plateau itself is characterized by wide, high (an average of 1200m) plains mostly covered by the Savanna grassland (tall grass and thorny bushes).

Due to its location, South Africa features warm, dry subtropical weather, although temperatures tend to be lower than in other regions at similar latitudes (i.e. Australia) because of the greater elevation above sea level.

There are two famous South African weather features: sunshine and the gale-force wind on the coast, especially the southwestern one, which earned the Cape of Good Hope its name.

December and January are the main summer holiday months with temperatures easily exceeding 32°C (90°F). In May and June, autumn brings warm days and cool nights. From the beginning of July to the end of September, cold conditions prevail in the inmost regions of the country, with rain in the Western Cape.

Population

South Africa has one of the world's most diverse populations, including four major ethnicities: African (75.2%), white (13.6%), colored/mixed (8.6%) and Asian (2.6%). The Nguni people consist of the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi, who account for two-thirds of the population; the Sotho-Tswana people include the Southern, Northern (Pedi) and Western Sotho (Tswana); other ethnicities include the Tsonga; the Venda; Afrikaners; English; Coloreds and Indians.

A few members of the Griquas, who are of Khoi-Khoi-European ancestry, and the Cape Malays, who are descendants of the early Muslim population from the Dutch colonial period, also live in South Africa, which in addition is home to a considerable number of immigrants from other African and Asian countries.

Language

To acknowledge the people's diversity, official status is given to 11 languages at the national level and the government promotes linguistic diversity. No one language is native to a majority of the population. Official languages are Zulu 22.4%, Xhosa 17.5%, Afrikaans 15.9%, English 9.1%, Tswana 7.2%, Sotho 6.9%, Tsonga 4.2%, Swazi 2.6%, Venda 1.7%, Ndebele 1.5%, Pedi 0.9%. Afrikaans is considered the youngest language in the world (less than 100 years old), although it is South Africa's third most-spoken language. In this welter of tongues, most South Africans speak some conversational English. Many people speak all 11 official languages fluently.

Government

South Africa has had a democratic government since 1994 after the long struggle out of Apartheid under a constitution adopted in 1996. South Africa has three capitals with the three-branch government division divided among them: Pretoria is the administrative capital, Cape Town is the legislative capital and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital.

The president is the head of state and leads the cabinet. Parliament consists of the National Assembly, with 400 members, and the Senate, which includes 10 senators from each of the nine provinces. The National Assembly elects the president.

Religion

South Africa's religions are as diverse as its people: 68% percent are Christian, 2% are Muslim, 1.5% are Hindu and 28.5% practice traditional/animistic religions. Fewer than 1% follow other religions, including Judaism and Confucianism. Most denominations are

represented, and official policy is one of non-interference in religious practices. Churches, mosques, temples and synagogues are located in most major cities.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. To get ready, first make every effort to learn some key English words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language. Your effort in learning some basics of other languages will be highly appreciated as well.

To familiarize yourself further with life in South Africa, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about South Africa and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to South Africa. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a South African. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Interculture South Africa will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

South African people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously South African

✨ Although it is divided into nine provinces, one is called a state since it is named Orange Free State, reflecting pride in its history.

✨ South Africa has three capital cities.

✨ Only one street in the world houses two Nobel Peace Prize winners: Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu both have houses on Soweto's Vilakazi Street, Orlando West.

✨ In 1998, Graça Machel married Nelson Mandela and became the first woman in the world to have married the heads of state of two different countries. She was previously married to Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique.

✨ South Africa is one of only 12 countries whose tap water is safe to drink. It is rated third-best worldwide.

✨ South Africa is home to the "Big Five": lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino—the five large animals that nearly everyone wants to see on safari. It also has giraffes, cheetahs and whale sharks.

✨ Mandela's famous [statement from the dock in the Rivonia Trial](#) ends with these words: *"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."*

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	1,219,912 km ² , 475,766 mi ²
	Population	44,328,322
	Official languages	Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, English, Tswana, Sotho, Tsonga, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele, Pedi
	Government	Republic
Currency	Rand, divided into 100 cents	
Useful websites	http://www.insanetree.com/index.htm http://www.gov.za/sa_overview/index.html	
AFS Interculture South Africa website	http://afsweb.afs.org/southafrica.nsf	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>