

FINAL REPORT

Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Study Program: Liberal Arts
and Sciences

Major: Culture and History

Degree: Bachelor of Arts

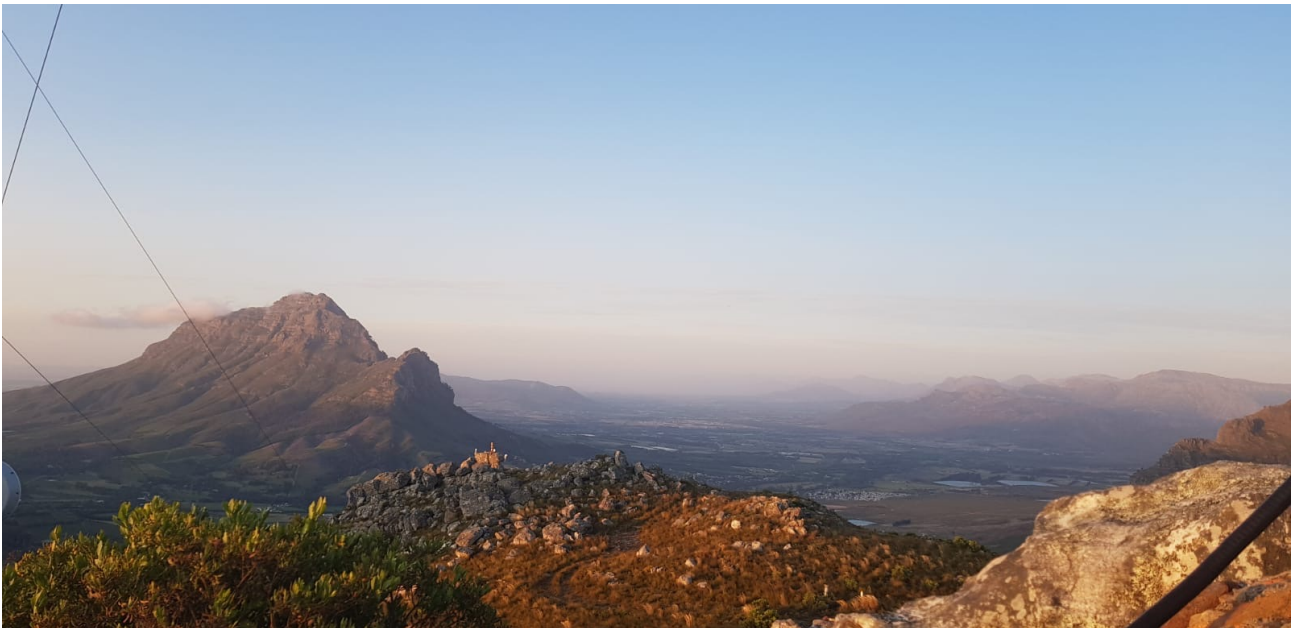
Host country: South Africa

Stay abroad: February to
December 2019

Host university: Stellenbosch
University



Living, working and studying conditions



Personal and academic interest in the host country

Before applying for the exchange program I did not have any particular interest in South Africa. However, when I started thinking about the possibility of studying in South Africa, the more I got intrigued with its rich past and present. I could see the benefits of studying culture and history in context rather than studying them from afar – and which better place to do so than South Africa with its 11 official languages, even more cultures and its complex past?

By going to South Africa I could combine my personal interest for languages and cultures with what is at the heart of my studies.

Preparation and organisation of my stay abroad

Decision-making

How did I decide for South Africa? The answer is quite easy. There was a presentation at my department about the possibilities we have in regard to staying abroad. I saw South Africa was one of those possibilities – already starting in February. As I had already been in Freiburg for a year longer than my classmates I was very keen for a change, and South Africa, sounding interesting and new, offered that change.

Visa

As soon as I received my acceptance letter from Stellenbosch University (SU), I took the necessary steps to apply for a student visa. (Other students have reported that they had to apply for an exchange visa so just make sure which one you are supposed to apply for.)

The necessary steps/documents hereby comprise the following:

- Make sure you have a passport that is valid for no less than 30 days after departing from SA.
- Passport photocopies
- Completion of the application form (to be found on the website of the South African Embassy <https://www.suedafrika.org/en.html> alongside all other necessary information in regard to the application)
- Book a train either to Munich or Berlin – depending on at which embassy you have to hand in your documentation.
- One biometric photograph.
- The official letter you have received from SU for the visa application.
- Choose a South African health insurance and insure yourself with that for the duration of your stay in SA (I chose Momentum Health). This is needed for your visa application but does not mean that you should not also have another health insurance covering you during your stay in SA (at least this is what I opted for). Make sure to pay early enough as my bank first blocked the payment and I had to call them to enable the payment which took a day or two.
- Get the bank statements from the last 3 months up to the week you submit your visa application
→ they have to be sent to you by your bank and each page should be stamped. Your current balance should not be less than R 3000.
- Go to the city where you are registered and request an original police clearance certificate.
- Make an appointment with a doctor so that s/he can fill out the medical certificate needed for the visa.
- Make an appointment with a radiologist to get an x-ray done so that s/he can fill out the radiological report needed for the visa. (This is where I went: <http://www.radiologische-praxis-freiburg.de/impressum.html>)
- Pay the applicable fee of 30 € early enough.
- Get a DHL envelope (ExpressEasy Prepaid National).

- You do not have to have a return flight – if you can proof that you have the financial means necessary and needed to book one. Fill in the required field in the visa application form. At least this was the case at the Munich embassy for me. You should have a flight there, simply because this is the date you need to put into your application and your visa most probably starts on this day only. To have an earlier flight therefore might be a problem.

Flights

I only booked the flight to Cape Town as I did not know yet what my plans where for after the semester ends and because I stayed for two semesters. Moreover, I booked a direct flight with Condor which is not possible anymore as far as I know. The one-way flight cost 450 €, but this was during peak season at the beginning of February.

Health insurance

I had both, a German as well as a South African insurance. You do need a South African one for the visa application, however, I felt better also being covered by a German health insurance as the South African one is very limited.

For the South African one I picked *Momentum Health* with a cost of R448 per month in 2019.

Furthermore I was covered by *envivas Krankenversicherung AG* with the tariff TRAVELXLO and a cost of 0,89 EUR per day.

Accommodation search

This was easier than expected. I did not start early with searching for an accommodation but I was lucky and found a room in a private house together with other international students. Staying in the university accommodation (i.e. Academia) is slightly cheaper but also less cozy in my eyes. I searched on the websites provided by the university and clicked through the offers posted on the SU Internationals website – this is where I found an advertisement for my house: Bergzicht House.

Whatever you find, however, make sure that it is in decent walking/cycling distance to university and not in the dodge areas of town. At best get in contact with a Matie Buddy (a student from SU) to make sure that the location of what you found is okay and safe – most are!

Make sure the costs are within a specific framework – accommodation should not cost more than R 6500 and that already is on the higher end.

Living expenses

For me the living expenses were the same as in Freiburg as I mostly cooked and the accommodation cost approximately the same. This most definitely, however, depends on your own lifestyle. In day to day live I would assume costs should be around the same but of course you want to travel and do day trips. This is where the costs did increase for me, especially as transport is more costly in South Africa in lack of a reliable and safe public transport system.

Language

Day to day life is in English, however, be aware that Stellenbosch has formerly been an Afrikaans-only university and some courses are still offered in both languages at the same time – meaning that you might have to make use of translation services if you want to follow at all times. Nevertheless, you should always be able to make yourself understood and most South Africans are bi- or multilingual – no wonder with South Africa having a total of 11 official languages alone.

Transportation system

There is no reliable and safe public transport, therefore, you have to make use of *uber* and car rentals in order to get around the country. For within Stellenbosch walking is not a problem (apart from at night of course) and cycling is a good way of getting around. You can rent a maties bike, which cost R2500, including a refundable deposit of R1500 and are a good way to get to university and around.

Behaviours

There are a multitude of different cultures within South Africa and all have different customs and behavioural norms. Just be aware and try to understand the setting you are in. Just as you might think the behaviour of others seems weird and impolite, so others might think of your behaviour.

Politics

Apartheid only came to an official end in 1994 – and one can still see the effects this system of segregation had on South Africa and its people. Corruption is a biggie in South Africa and slows the country down. Crime is amongst the highest in the world – which does not mean that you should always expect the worst. People are generally friendly and as in any other country of the world you just have to inform yourself, get to know the rules and norms and you should be fine. And adopt

the motto “better safe than sorry” when thinking about walking the 800 m to home at night. Take an uber and be safe!!

Practical advice where to find useful information

For me the university website was very helpful as well as having a matie buddy, especially before coming to South Africa and being able to judge myself.

The staff of the international office of the SU is also very helpful and classmates are more than willing to help you out if you have questions.

My host country and my host university?

South Africa’s nature is amazing and you can’t imagine it until you are here!

It is a very interesting, complex, messed up and yet great country, which you will never be able to fully understand but which will offer you valuable and incomparable insights.

SU is situated in-between the mountains, has a rich and yet messed up history but a great offer of courses and academic insight.

Sometimes you will be frustrated, you will be wanting to walk at night, to have proper bread and no electrical fence around your home, but then again you want to stay, hike, take everything in and take things with you.

A special impression, a personal experience, a funny anecdote

Once upon a time we decided to attend the Fridays for Future Climate Strike. As we thought it would send the wrong signal to go to a climate strike by car, we finally decided to go by train. We, that is a group of approximately 10 people, locals as well as internationals from the Ecomaties – the sustainable society on campus. You have to know that taking the train is NOT normal – at all. It is considered dangerous, unreliable and nothing a (white) university student would usually do. You also have to know that many dangers here cannot be described. No one will be able to say what exactly it is that is dangerous as most people you will be likely to interact with do not live in a situation where they are actually exposed to those dangers in their day to day lives. Danger here, therefore, does not signify actual, physical, “feelable” danger. Rather it is the feeling of an unknown

threat, hovering over you and following you wherever you go. Hence the motto “better safe than sorry”.

And yes, it is true, one phone got stolen and yes, it is also true that we were the only white people on the train and therefore did attract a lot of attention. But this attention was not overwhelmingly negative. The opposite is the case. We encountered people that were super curious as to what we were doing, carrying our cardboard signs saying “The dinosaurs thought they had time, too”, and really wanted to understand what it was that made us fight for the cause. We encountered people being interested in what we studied and people complaining about the delay – just as we did. We indeed are all the same! We had the most interesting encounters amongst which a discussion about the source of the climate change – God or nature? – that lasted for the whole duration of the train trip. We heard life stories and experienced what indeed is the day to day experience of a vast majority of the South African society. A train that was supposed to take an hour, and took three – and a gaze turned into a greeting, turned into small talk, turned into a discussion and the utterance “I wouldn't have thought I would actually enjoy this train ride” by one of our female conversation partners who really challenged our views and the way we defended them. Have you ever thought about why you believe what you believe? Trust me, defending your belief system in a context where you do share annoyance about the train but not the least background is quite challenging and really makes you question your way of coming to conclusions.

I really am very grateful for this experience but want to emphasise that you have to be in a big group, know about the risks and have someone with SA train experience with you in order to attempt this adventure.

Academic insights, interests and goals



General impression of the host university

Study conditions

I attended solely courses at the Arts and Social Sciences Department, hence all the following might be different if you study at a different department.

I had an attendance policy for all my courses, which was a bit surprising but okay as this also is the case for my study program at home. Moreover, SU makes use of continuous assessment throughout the semester in combination with a written examination at the end of the semester. This can be quite challenging if you are not used to this as it does mean more studying during the time you also have to attend classes.

The quality and quantity of what you learn does differ enormously between 1st and 3rd year courses, with the 1st year courses not going as much into depth and rather testing your memory skills and the 3rd year courses challenging your critical thinking and analysis skill whilst diving deep into a topic.

Moreover, you have the option to take GEP courses (only offered to international students). They are great to teach you the theory about the culture you will be immersed to but are not quite

challenging. Nevertheless, I am glad I took the course “Politics and Cultural Change in Contemporary South Africa” as it helped me connect my experiences and insights of South Africa with theoretical knowledge and facts.

Contact persons and advisory service

Before you come to SU you have the choice to get assigned a matie buddy. This is a great option as you will be matched with a fellow local student from SU who will be able to help you with any questions and might be a great contact to get to know to other South African students.

When it comes to more administrative and academic matters, the International Office at SU will be your first address. They generally are very helpful (especially Hanna) and try to make your stay at SU as nice and worry-free as possible.

Courses attended

I attended an Afrikaans for beginners course, a third year philosophy course which has to be my favourite one (about Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, Saussure and Derrida), courses about South Africa, from a sociological as well as cultural perspective, a yearlong linguistics course, as well as one ethnography and one course in ancient cultures.

I liked the mixture of my courses as I had a good combination of very challenging subjects (mostly 3rd year courses) and subjects where I already had some knowledge in – at the end you also want to have some time outside of university to explore the country you are living in.

Extracurricular activities (e.g. workshops, additional academic events etc.)

During my first semester holidays I decided to do an internship in order to gain some insights not only academically but also in practice. If you are staying for more than just a semester, I can only recommend doing something outside university in order to put into practice and into proof what you have learned about South Africa. I really appreciate the insights I have gained there.

Content and purpose of my academic exchange

Did you ever feel over-challenged, unchallenged or was it just right?

The conditions the university is set in (politics, past, etc.) sometimes might challenge your perspectives, your beliefs and the background you are coming from. On the same page, however, in

a way this also strengthened my beliefs, what I stand for and my values, and made me more appreciative of what I have and what I study.

What did you experience and learn?

So much.

Does it prove beneficial to your further studies, language skills and/or your career entry?

For sure! I have learned a lot more about the opportunities I have within my study program when I had to decide which courses to take at SU and made me appreciate my study program more. I am more confident now that I am indeed studying what is the right thing for me.

The exchange has also shown me what my interests are and where I want to put my focus on academically: language, its context(s) and implications.

Most definitely my English language skills have improved further and I have learned a new language.

Criticism and recommendations

I am very grateful for the opportunities I had through the exchange and the memories I am taking with me.

I am now sure that I am studying what I want to study and that there would not be a better study program for me.

I also know that even though I did not have in mind to go to South Africa in the first place, there couldn't have been a better country in terms of my academic interests, my love for nature and interest for other people and cultures.

It was challenging at times, not always easy, exciting, thrilling, stunning, it has been a great experience and has yet to become a memory.

South Africa confronts you not only with yourself and your perspectives but each and every day reminds you how differently your life could have been if you were born in a different place and a different time.