



## Focus on SOUTH AFRICA Community Service Program Adult Program

*“My host family was so excited...I felt touched. My host sister shared her room with me, and my mother, father and brother treated me like their family member. My name was changed into the Zulu name, “Mbali,” meaning “flower,” so I didn’t have the opportunity to become homesick. Our dog was also given a German name. No money can pay for that experience, thanks to AFS for the opportunity.”*

*Angelika Goetz, participant from Germany, 2003*

*“This country is certainly the perfect place to learn about forgiveness and solidarity among the different communities. These months will help us understand a culture we didn’t know, but above all to take advantage of this difference in order to go forward. This was a big step.”*

*Celine Florino, participant from France, 2003*

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.

### **Community Service Programs**

AFS’s Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in South Africa by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to

teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in South Africa have worked with orphans and street children as well as with the disabled, as math and science teachers, in community-improvement organizations, even as violin teachers, among other projects. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

## ***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.

### **Arrival orientation**

Participants arrive at Johannesburg International Airport and are met by AFS Interculture South Africa staff or volunteers who escort them to a five-day arrival orientation in and around Johannesburg. This program explores South African cultures, AFS rules, safety considerations and expectations for the various community service assignments. Afterward, participants are sent to their host communities, typically by bus or airplane on a weekend so that participants can find their feet socially with their host family or organization before the start of work on Monday.

### **Additional orientations**

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Interculture South Africa will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

## ***Living in South Africa***

### **Living arrangements**

Some participants in AFS Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Other participants live where their community service organization conducts its business. Still others live in rooms provided elsewhere by their local service organizations.

### **Typical day**

Some South African communities have a very relaxed attitude about time, and residents there are not stressed if they are late for events. Similarly, though a lot of work needs to be done, some communities feel that there is always plenty of time to complete jobs, and talking to someone (over a tea break, for instance) is more important than constant serious work.

On weekdays, families typically rise at 5:00 a.m., get ready for the day and leave for work at 6:30. People who work very far from home leave for work as early as 4:00 a.m. and only get home at 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. Bedtime is typically between 10:00 and 11:00 p.m. Families spend weekends going out, shopping, playing sports, visiting relatives and friends, going to movies and theater, attending funerals and weddings, attending church and enjoying various forms of entertainment

### **Food**

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. Vegetarians are difficult to place, especially vegans, in Black and Afrikaans families where meat is considered a vital part of a main meal.

### **Clothing**

Dressing habits in South Africa are very much like those of the Western countries. Although South African rural areas are quite conservative in their dress code, they permit decent casual clothing. Jeans, T-shirts, shorts and sweatshirts will probably be what you will wear most of the time. You will need to be aware of the dress code in your workplace so as to fit into the workplace culture.

### **Activities**

#### **Health**

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

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help 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.

#### **Safety**

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.

### **Travel**

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

### **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 community; travel from your host community to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host family or other placement arrangement; 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 are: 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 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-Khoisan-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.

AFS Interculture South Africa's program expects fluency in English but offers no language training.

### **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.

## ***Before You Go***

### **Looking Forward**

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience.

Make every effort to improve your English language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in South Africa, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to South Africa. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or your country's AFS office.

In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, South Africans will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

### **Documents**

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

## ***How to Apply***

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

Country data	Size	1,219,912 km <sup>2</sup> 475,766 mi <sup>2</sup>
	Population	44,328,322
	Official language	Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, English, Tswana, Sotho,

		Tsonga, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele, Pedi
	Government	Republic
Currency	Rand, divided into 100 cents	
Useful websites	<a href="http://www.insanetree.com/index.htm">http://www.insanetree.com/index.htm</a> <a href="http://www.gov.za/sa_overview/index.html">http://www.gov.za/sa_overview/index.html</a>	
AFS Interculture South Africa website	<a href="http://afsweb.afs.org/southafrica.nsf">http://afsweb.afs.org/southafrica.nsf</a>	

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>