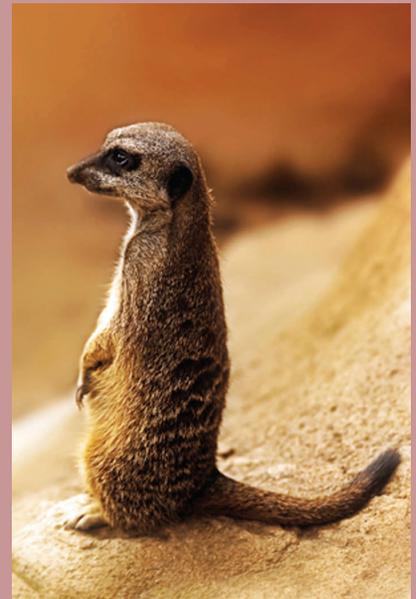


Here's my Study Abroad Story

Lia Phillips SIT Community Health Durban, South Africa

Major: Biology/Psychology

Program Description: I chose SIT's Community Health program based in Durban, South Africa. During the first two months, we took a seminar in Community Health and a seminar in introductory Zulu, the language most commonly spoken in the KwaZulu-Natal area. After learning about the health issues that are most common in South African communities, we were given a month and a small budget to complete an Independent Study Project anywhere in South Africa that interested us. We stayed in a homestay with African families in a township during our time in Durban and went on several short homestays in rural South Africa. We arranged our own housing during the time that we were working on our study projects. Our time culminated in presentations of our Independent Study Projects back in Durban and subsequent sightseeing up the eastern coast.



Typical Day: When I was in Durban, I would wake up and meet a friend to go for a run through the streets up Cato Manor, the township we were staying in. Running was actually one of the ways that I really got to know the layout of the neighborhood I stayed in. We would be in class by 8 am, have a Zulu lesson, and then listen to about three lectures from guests like professors of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, representatives of local or national NGOs, and representatives of government health programs. In short, we learned from experts in the field. I was home by 5 pm, at which point my homestay mother, Mama Busi, would have a hot dinner ready. I would help my little sisters with their homework, watch South African soap operas with my mother and then go to sleep early (South African neighborhoods can be dangerous after dark).

When I was in Cape Town, doing my Independent Study Project, I would walk from my apartment to the minibus station and take a minibus taxi (which is an experience in itself) to volunteer at ThembaCare, a childcare center for infants and young children with HIV whose parents have neglected to take proper care of them. I would spend the day with the children, making observations and helping out, and leave by 5 pm. I spent the evenings and weekends exploring and sightseeing in Cape Town.

Highlights: It's impossible to give only one answer to this question, so I'll have to give several. The most fulfilling part of my experience was probably living with my homestay family. I learned so much from them just by doing what they did every day, and really pushed my own personal boundaries by living with them. My homestay family made me feel more integrated into South African society and culture than I thought would be possible. Without them, I would not have known what it is *really* like to live in South Africa.

Something I'll remember forever was a day when I was shadowing a rural health care worker on the outskirts of a rural town called Amatikulu. We visited a man in his house, a one-room dirt floor hut, and checked up on his health. I thought we were done after the check-up, but the health workers surprised me by singing the most soulful and beautiful prayer that I have ever heard – it brought tears to everyone's eyes. This moment really hit home for me because it showed me firsthand how important community is in the healthcare field.

Other highlights that I feel like I have to mention were staying with a rural African family and shadowing social workers in one of the poorest townships in South Africa aiming to reinforce HIV care education.

Challenges: The biggest challenge that I had was having to take the initiative for my independent study project. SIT gave us almost complete freedom with what we could do for our project and where we could relocate ourselves. Finding a place to do my practicum study, along with finding a place to live and arranging transport in a foreign country was very difficult, however I think the overall experience made me feel more confident in myself.

Advice? Keep an open mind! Being flexible and keeping a go-with-the-flow attitude were responsible for making my experience extraordinary.