

## Study abroad semester in South Africa 2022 - Experience Report

I completed my study abroad semester in South Africa during my 5th semester. I was enrolled at Nelson Mandela University (NMU) in Port Elizabeth. NMU is also a partner university of Ostfalia. However, the tuition fees, which are not negligible, had to be paid by myself. Fortunately, I received a scholarship that provided me with very good financial support.

Since I couldn't estimate how much of South Africa I would be able to explore during the semester, I planned to allocate about a month for traveling after my lectures. In total, I stayed in South Africa from July 15th to December 15th. I would highly recommend the "travel month" to everyone, even though there was still time for excursions near PE (Port Elizabeth) alongside the studies.

### Preparation

It is important to make a decision early on whether you want to pursue a study abroad semester (in South Africa). Planning and preparation take a significant amount of time. Therefore, I spent a considerable amount of time on planning during my 4th semester. However, Ostfalia takes this effort into account, so you have to collect fewer credits during your stay abroad compared to studying in Germany.

Together with a friend who also went to South Africa, we created a guide for preparing for the study abroad semester. We compiled the list to the best of our knowledge and belief. However, we cannot guarantee its completeness. Furthermore, the order of application steps may vary for each individual. Keep in mind that each step requires processing time from your contact person. So, allocate sufficient time for all steps and start early.

1. Apply for the **mobility window**.
2. Obtain the **DAAD language proficiency certificate** (At Mr. Caplan, B2 level of English is required).
3. **Apply to NMU** (Submit CV and motivation letter - the chances of being accepted are very high since they receive a substantial amount of tuition fees from you).

4. **Apply for a scholarship** (Give it a try!).
5. **Apply for a visa** (as early as possible! According to the consulate, the process takes approximately 8 weeks after receiving the letter. Additionally, there are many documents to gather, such as a tuberculosis ultrasound. You will also need to plan a visit to the consulate in Berlin, which is mandatory to obtain the visa).
6. **Register for accommodation** (You must choose the university's own student dormitory, "Campus Key." Looking for your own apartment is not allowed and not advisable since all students are housed in Campus Key. You have the choice between Scarborough (shared apartments with 5 or 10 people) and 9th Avenue (shared apartments with 2 people). We recommend Scarborough - most events take place there, and most international students reside there).
7. **Health insurance** (You are obliged to take out South African insurance. You have two providers to choose from, Momentum and Compcare, with minimal differences in price and coverage).
8. **Book your flight**
9. **Choose your modules** (These will be finalized in South Africa, but it's good to think in advance about your preferences. Pro tip: Check the "Module Timetable" to see when the courses are scheduled).
10. **Attend the Orientation Week** (This takes place at NMU. Here you will receive important information and get to know other international students).

The first point of contact in Germany will be Ms. Anumba (from the ISO - International Student Office). She can always assist you in the application process. If you are unsure about the next steps, reach out to her. She handles the mobility window and the approval for the Learning Agreement (LA), among other things. Additionally, she will be your contact person when you are back in Germany.

For questions regarding the host university (Nelson Mandela University), there is a dedicated email address that all international students can contact: [studyabroad@mandela.ac.za](mailto:studyabroad@mandela.ac.za)  
(Note: The response may take some time).

**Additional contact persons:**

[monalisa.allen@mandela.ac.za](mailto:monalisa.allen@mandela.ac.za)

[intfees@mandela.ac.za](mailto:intfees@mandela.ac.za) (for all financial matters)

[Sharon.barnes@mandela.ac.za](mailto:Sharon.barnes@mandela.ac.za)

**University Life:**

Through the mobility window, I had to complete 20 German credit points in South Africa, which is equivalent to 40 South African credit points. Due to my choice of modules, I ended up with 42 credit points. However, the workload does not necessarily depend on the credit points. This is something I and other international students have observed.

At the beginning of the semester, we were allowed to explore a module for two weeks. If we didn't like the module, we could easily switch without having to pay any fees.

In the end, I decided to take the following four courses:

**Afrikaans for Beginners** - This module was exclusively online. There were a total of four assignments to complete, and there was no exam. Unfortunately, hardly anyone in Port Elizabeth speaks Afrikaans, so it was challenging to apply the learned words in practice.

**Lifespan Development** - This module was also conducted entirely online since nearly 900 students enrolled in it. There were a total of four online exams (not open-book).

**Teamsports** - I had sports practice once a week in this module. I had the opportunity to try out sports that are common in South Africa, such as netball, rugby, and soccer. I highly recommend this module as it is also a great way to connect with the locals.

**Sports Event and Law** - This module consisted of two areas. I had two lectures per week, which typically lasted 70 minutes in South Africa. In this module, I had several assignments, multiple exams, and a term paper.

I was the only international student in all of these modules. However, it was not a problem because the South African students welcomed me very kindly.

Overall, during the semester in South Africa, you will have to do more than you are used to in Germany. However, as a result, you usually have a less stressful exam period at the end.

### **Leisure Time:**

Even though Port Elizabeth is a large city, there isn't a lot to do there. Nevertheless, the neighborhood of Summerstrand (where the student residences are located) is very livable. There are two malls nearby with several shops and restaurants. Additionally, the beach is just a minute's walk from the dormitories and is perfect for surfing, sunbathing, and swimming. From the beach, you will likely be able to spot whales or dolphins.

It was quite common for us to do things in the area together with other international students. This could include visiting bars or clubs, as well as taking short trips to Tsitsikamma, Graff Reinet, Plettenberg Bay, and many more. Almost all international students rented cars from Karl, a German who rents out old Golfs in PE. Although there is a relatively high risk of them breaking down, I believe that the rental price and driving experience make up for it. These old Golfs are really popular there! I shared the car with four other international students, which made it even more affordable.

One of my favorites in South Africa, however, was the Wild Coast, which is the eastern coast. Unlike the highly touristy Garden Route (southern coast), this area still has very rural parts. So, at times, you drive for kilometers through seemingly "nothingness."

### **Finances:**

It is essential to have some extra money reserves if you plan to study abroad. This is because of the high tuition fees, flight tickets, and other expenses.

Put together, my costs for the half-year amounted to approximately 9,000-10,000€. However, this includes all expenses such as rent, car rental, food, entrance fees for national parks, etc. Generally, it can be said that the cost of living there is lower than in Germany, especially when it comes to bar and restaurant visits. Compared to Germany, these are truly very affordable. I would argue that one could have spent much more during that half-year, as many international students did. Nevertheless, I did not have to forgo trips and activities.

### **Conclusion:**

Take the leap and apply for a semester abroad in South Africa; it will undoubtedly be a very exciting, interesting, and enjoyable adventure. It is very easy to make connections there, as there are many international students in the two dormitories, estimated to be around 60-70. Additionally, there is an orientation week at the beginning, which includes various events organized and funded by the university or the dormitory to get to know the other international students. So, it is worth arriving a bit earlier than the actual start of the semester.

**I wish you lots of fun and many new experiences!**

Here are some impressions for you:



My accomodation „Scarborough“ (1 min. to walk to the beach) while sunset



My room in a shared-flat with 5 person



Here you can see the beach that inspired me to buy my own surfboard. (I recommend "The Boardroom" shop! The owner refunds at least 50% of the price if you sell it back to him. It's also great if your board needs to be repaired.)





Tsitsikamma



Wilderness



Plettenberg Bay (diving with seals)



Coffee Bay (on the Wildcoast → Insider tip)



Our beloved rental car - "Andreas"