



# Durban, South Africa Guidebook



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meet Nathan Jansen,  
Managing Director

Welcome to Mercy Ships - we're grateful you'll be serving alongside us! We may not be performing surgeries during this time, but don't be fooled - there is so much meaningful work to be done. The *Africa Mercy* will dock in Durban, South Africa from January through April 2026 for ship maintenance and preparation for our next field service.

The South Africa Guidebook is a supplement to our General Volunteer Guidebook.

Please ensure you take adequate time to read both guidebooks, as they are both equally important in helping you fully prepare for your travel and time on board.

We are so excited for you to join us, and we hope you are, too!

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The Africa Mercy

# South Africa Country Information

## Country Flag



## About South Africa

South Africa is the southern-most country on the African continent and is known for its varied and stunning topography, biodiversity, cultural diversity, and natural resources.

Settled by Khoisan tribes around 500 A.D., the area was mostly left alone from European influences until Dutch traders arrived in 1652. The Cape of Good Hope was later seized by the British in the early 1800s, further colonizing the area and its diverse inhabitants. Since gaining independence from European colonizers in 1961 and dismantling the apartheid system in the 1990s, South Africa has made significant progress in establishing social equity for its diverse population.

The *Africa Mercy* will be located in Durban, the third largest city in South Africa and a major coastal city in the KwaZulu-Natal province on the nation's eastern coast.

## Key Details

**Capital Cities:** Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Cape Town

**Region:** Southern Africa

**Currency:** South African rand (ZAR)

**Population:** 59.89 million

**Primary religions:** Christian (86%), traditional or tribal beliefs (5.4%), nil (5.2%)

**Primary languages:** isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, isiNdebele

## Temperatures

Weather in Durban is fairly warm year-round, but does cool off in winter (May through August). Average temperatures for our time in Durban are listed here:

Temperature in Durban												
Month:	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
High	29 °C	29 °C	29 °C	27 °C	26 °C	24 °C	24 °C	24 °C	25 °C	25 °C	26 °C	28 °C
Low	21 °C	21 °C	20 °C	18 °C	14 °C	11 °C	11 °C	13 °C	15 °C	17 °C	18 °C	20 °C
High	84 °F	85 °F	83 °F	81 °F	78 °F	76 °F	74 °F	75 °F	76 °F	77 °F	79 °F	82 °F
Low	70 °F	70 °F	65 °F	64 °F	58 °F	52 °F	52 °F	55 °F	60 °F	62 °F	65 °F	68 °F

## Location



# What to Expect during Maintenance

## Maintenance Plans:

The *Africa Mercy* plans to be in South Africa from January through April 2026.

This will be a busy maintenance period for the ship and crew. Some of the projects planned during this time are:

- Engine repairs and overhauls
- Electrical repairs
- HVAC repairs
- Steel works
- Crane modifications
- Piping repairs
- Biomedical repairs and replacements
- Space modifications
- IT infrastructure upgrades and repairs
- Passenger Ship Safety Certification

and much more!

## What to Expect in Durban

The focus of our Annual Maintenance Period (AMP) is to make necessary repairs and modifications to the vessel. This time is also used to complete required audits and maritime surveys.

During this time, the vessel is turned into a construction zone, operating only with minimal crew who are essential to the work being done. The ship will be in dry dock for several weeks of this maintenance period.

The hospital will not be in service during AMP.

## Security

The shipyard is guarded by security, and we also have a security team on board.

As in other large urban centers, crime is a significant problem in Durban. Most criminal activity involves petty, opportunistic theft such as pickpocketing and bag or mobile phone snatching. When ashore, it is important to practice safe habits - travel in groups of two or more, keep your belongings close, obey the curfew, and utilize common sense in terms of where and with whom you go.

Crew are not permitted to walk out of the shipyard and will be required to either travel with the shuttles or hired vehicles. Full security reports are available upon request.

## Identification Needs

Travelers must always carry identification. The Purser on board the ship can provide all crew with a "ship stamped" color copy of your passport to use when going off ship. Also, depending on your Visa status, you may be provided with your Seaman's book to carry.

## Driver's License

If you choose to hire a rental car while in Durban, you must bring your original passport and your local country driving permit (license) when you go to rent the car. You may also be required to carry an International Driving Permit. To enter the shipyard, you will need to show your Mercy Ships and Dormac (shipyard) ID cards. Please note: Parking is limited and may not be available for rental cars.

# What to Expect during Maintenance



*Joy, Head Receptionist*

## Fun, Games, and Time Off

While there is plenty to do on board like playing board games with other crew, or using the crew galley to bake something nice, crew also spend time exploring the country we are docked in. When we arrive, we will have regular shuttles and opportunities to see different activities and locations such as Shongweni Market, zip line, game parks, etc. Mercy Ships does not specially organize off-ship tours or activities, however, there are always crew who actively organize trips, excursions, and visits to local churches which you can join.

## Crew

During maintenance, we are solely focusing on projects and will have minimal crew on board. Additionally, Mercy Ships staff, vendors, contractors, and shipyard workers will be working on board and around the ship during this time.

## Lodging

Crew on board may be expected to move cabins at various points during their stay as we service different areas of the ship.

Because the safety and wellbeing of our crew is important, crew may be housed at a local hotel to get the rest they need during the dry dock phase of the AMP. Transport to and from the vessel for work and hotel arrangements will be made and paid for by Mercy Ships.

## Laundry

The laundry facility on board will be closed intermittently during AMP. You will be notified in advance so you can make arrangements to do laundry when the facility is open. Those housed ashore will have access to laundry facilities ashore.

## Noise levels

It can be noisy while crew and contractors complete their maintenance during the day and early evening, but we are committed to respecting quiet hours for crew to rest well! You may want to bring a pair of earplugs if you are sensitive to noise.

## Services

The air conditioning on board may be switched off intermittently during our time in Durban.

The following may be unavailable or intermittently available:

- HVAC systems
- Ship Shop
- Cafe
- Gym / Weight Room
- Dining Room
- WiFi (hot spots available dockside)
- The Pool (completely unavailable during this time)
- There will also be approximately 2 weeks of "blackout", with no AC, no plumbing, and only emergency lighting.

# What to Expect during Maintenance

## Wellness and Self-Care

Living in a foreign country can be challenging. You're working and living in a confined space, away from family and the familiarity of home. The parts of life in the community that make it unique and joyful can also be the same things that sometimes make it difficult. We work to ensure every crew member feels like a valued part of the community, with healthy boundaries, and space to rest when needed! Our Chaplaincy Team will also be available to assist with any crew needs.

## Crew Clinic

During our maintenance period, the Crew Clinic will be functioning at a baseline level to support crew needs. Any more serious health concerns will need to be addressed in a clinic ashore.



meet Sebastian,  
Carpenter

# Dress Code

	Appropriate to Wear	Inappropriate to Wear	More Information
<b>On Ship Business/office wear (for non-uniform, internal-facing roles)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart-casual trousers, skirts, and dresses</li> <li>• Smart-casual blouses and shirts, including polo shirts</li> <li>• Suit jackets</li> <li>• Smart-casual shoes. Smart sandals are appropriate for women. Trainers/sneakers can be worn during normal office work.</li> <li>• Jeans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorts</li> <li>• Casual T-shirts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knees should be covered when standing and sitting for both men and women. Skirts that fall between mid-thigh and knee should be worn with leggings or opaque tights/hose underneath.</li> <li>• Sleeveless tops with wide straps are fine.</li> <li>• Men are not required to wear business suits and/or neckties but they can be worn if preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Official meetings and functions, church attendance (both on &amp; off ship)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart trousers, skirts, and dresses</li> <li>• Smart blouses and shirts</li> <li>• Suit jackets</li> <li>• Smart-casual shoes. Smart sandals are appropriate for women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorts</li> <li>• Jeans</li> <li>• Casual T-shirts</li> <li>• Trainers/sneakers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men should wear a shirt and necktie if the meeting is formal.</li> </ul>
<b>Casual wear (both on and off ship)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeans</li> <li>• T-shirts</li> <li>• Trainers/sneakers</li> <li>• Loose-fitting shorts that are mid-thigh or longer</li> <li>• Leggings where worn with a tunic-style top to mid-thigh or lower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very tight or high-cut shorts ('running' shorts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caution is needed when worn in areas aboard the ship outside of the functional use as shower shoes.</li> <li>• If worn off-ship, they must be replaced with appropriate footwear for climbing up or down the gangway.</li> </ul>
<b>Exercising (both on and off ship)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lycra/Spandex leggings and tops</li> <li>• Basketball jersey-style tops</li> <li>• Short 'running' shorts</li> <li>• Exercise shirts (on board only)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compression wear worn without any covering</li> <li>• Sports bras worn without any covering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Board: Tight-fitting exercise gear should be covered up when walking through the ship.</li> </ul>
<b>Swimming (both on and off ship)</b>	<p>Women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-piece costume</li> <li>• Tankini'-style two-piece costume</li> <li>• 'Bikini'-style two-piece costume (off-ship ONLY)</li> </ul> <p>Men:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boxer or shorts-style swim trunks</li> </ul>	<p>Women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costumes with high-cut legs or plunging necklines</li> </ul> <p>Men:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tight-fitting high-cut trunks (Speedos)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Board: Swim-wear should only be showing at the pool. Please cover up when walking to and from the pool.</li> </ul>

# Travel to South Africa

## Arranging your travel

Once your Onboarding Specialist has given you clearance to do so, use the service dates in your offer letter as your date of arrival and departure for your transport, arriving between 7 AM - 10 PM and departing between 10 AM and no later than 2 AM.

## Ticket refund policy

All funded travel must be booked using non-refundable tickets unless the specific circumstances outlined in the Funded Crew Travel Policy permit the purchase of fully refundable tickets. If Mercy Ships initiates a change to the ship's schedule that affects your booked flights, the organization will cover any applicable change fees. Contact your Onboarding Specialist or the Travel Center with questions.

## Travel agents

Mercy Ships recommends Gordian Travel International (GTI) as our partnering travel agent. They can help secure seaman or humanitarian fares. By booking with GTI, you will also be granted access to Concur online booking tool and Flight Alerts, a travel risk management app.

## Gordian Travel International (GTI)

mercysipstravel@gordiantvl.com

+1 903 405 1311

## Arrival by plane

Flights should be booked in/out of the international airport in Durban - King Shaka International Airport (code DUR).

## Recommended Airlines

- Emirates
- Qatar Airways
- South African Airways
- Turkish Airlines
- FlySafair
- Airlink

## Questions?

We know arranging travel can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be - our travel team is here to help. Reach out at anytime to our team at [travel@mercyships.org](mailto:travel@mercyships.org).

# Travel Resources

## Registering with Foreign Affairs

Many countries allow travelers to register with the foreign affairs office (or national equivalent) and include the following types of benefits:

- Receive the latest safety and security information for your destination country, helping you make informed decisions regarding your travel plans.
- Allows your nation's embassy to contact you in an emergency situation - be it natural disaster, civil unrest, pandemic, or family emergency.

We encourage all volunteers to take this step for additional protection and peace of mind while away. [Click here](#) to see documented programs available.

## Tips to Avoid Jet-lag

If traveling through different time zones, here are some tricks to reduce the effects of jet-lag:

- Prepare at home before your departure - set your watch to match your new time zone and customize your sleep-wake rhythm.
- Don't eat a lot of food (overeat/snack).
- Drink a lot of water, and avoid other beverages.
- Go out in the sun or move around if you get sleepy during the day.
- Make your room as dark as possible if you have trouble sleeping at night (and remove other distractions - phones, television, etc.).
- Try taking a melatonin tablet before bed during your first week after travel, as it will help induce natural sleep as you adjust to the new time zone.

## Emergency Contacts

Save these phone numbers in case you need to contact the ship while you are traveling:

- Mercy Ships South Africa office: +27 (0) 21-788-3088
- Purser Email: [purser.afm@mercyships.org](mailto:purser.afm@mercyships.org)
- Purser Phone: +261 32 120 2238
- AFM Local phone: +261 32 120 2251
- AFM Satellite phone: +1 954 538 6110

## Required Documentation for Travel

Depending on your passport country, a visa may need to be acquired to join in South Africa. If you have questions, please refer to your Onboarding Specialist.

Crew must travel with the following documentation:

- South Africa visa (if required)
- Printed offer letter/acceptance letter from Mercy Ships (recommended)

# Maintenance FAQs

## **If I fly into South Africa and then come to the ship, can I get off again and go anywhere in South Africa?**

No. Once you arrive at the ship you will be stamped out of South Africa and will not be able to travel freely around the country. You will have restricted shore leave to the Durban metropolitan area only.

## **If I come to the ship and then leave the ship at the end of my commitment, can I travel in South Africa?**

No, you will be subject to the same visa status as the rest of the crew if you arrive in South Africa via the ship. If a crew member would like to do any personal traveling, you must leave the country for 14+ days and come back with a different type of visa (based on citizenship).

## **Will crew be allowed overnights in hotels?**

Yes, if you are overnighting prior to embarking on the vessel (e.g., taking a quick holiday before joining). *Once you embark the ship as crew, you are NOT allowed overnight stays due to immigration restrictions.*

## **What is considered the Durban area?**

We will communicate clearly established boundaries for the crew once on board.

## **Can I get Prescription medications on board?**

During maintenance, the pharmacy on board will not be active/open and cannot provide any medications. There are local pharmacies, but you will need a prescription to get anything filled.

As such, we advise bringing a supply of your prescription medications from home to last your entire stay through the maintenance period. When preparing your hand luggage pre-departure, we also highly recommend keeping at least a two-week supply in your carryon/hand luggage when travelling, in case your checked baggage is delayed or lost.

For additional details regarding these requirements, please refer to the immunization checklist you will be sent after you receive your official offer letter or contact our Medical Review Facilitator at [medical.review.facil@mercyships.org](mailto:medical.review.facil@mercyships.org).

# General Volunteer Guidebook

This Guidebook is a supplement to our General Volunteer Guidebook and contains information specific to our maintenance period. We ask that you please take time to read the General Guidebook as well to fully prepare for your travel and time on board.

Click the button below to view the General Volunteer guidebook and the topics listed here:

- Code of Conduct
- Community Life and Expectations
- Staying in Touch
- Dress Code
- Uniform Guidelines
- Crew Bank
- Packing Lists



[CLICK HERE](#)

*Thank you!*

We can't wait to continue the Mercy Ships legacy, bringing hope and healing to people just like Houleye! Years of blessing, sacrifice, smiles, hard work, and hope are ahead of us. Thank you for your part!



*Houleye*