



YALE ALUMNI SERVICE CORPS  CAPE TOWN 2018

Newsletter No. 1
March 2018

Dear YASC Cape Town 2018 Participants:

Welcome!

We're so happy that you have decided to join our group of 100 Yale alums, family, and friends for our first service trip to South Africa.

This is the first of what I hope will be a series of informative messages to help get all of us ready for the trip.

We'll try to answer all your questions on our website and in these newsletters, but if not, please don't hesitate to contact me or João. Our contact information is at the end of this newsletter.

A bit about me: I'm a '75 graduate of Yale College and the volunteer leader for this trip. My first trip with YASC was to Ghana in 2012. Since then I've been back to Ghana twice more as well as to India once. A lawyer by training, on past trips I've helped organize the medical teams.

João works for the Association of Yale Alumni and is the long-time director of YASC. He's been on almost all the trips over the years and has been a critical part of organizing this trip.

I'm looking forward to working with all the YASC veterans I know from past trips and meeting and getting to know all the first-timers as well.

We have a lot of great things planned for our visit to Cape Town.

So, let's get started...

Our Logo or “What is that blob doing at the top of the page?!”

How do you like the logo for our trip? You might be wondering what it depicts. Anyone who’s already been to Cape Town will instantly recognize the silhouette of Cape Town’s most prominent landmark—Table Mountain. The minute you arrive in Cape Town (or maybe even if you look out the window of the plane as you’re flying in), you will too. The flat-topped mountain can be seen from all over the city (when it’s not obscured by clouds!), and we’ll get a closer look when we do some of our exploration of the area during the first weekend.

[Note to anyone who is planning to arrive early and do some touring of Cape Town on your own: The cableway that goes to the top of Table Mountain will be closed from July 23 to August 5 for annual maintenance. If you want to go to the top (without having to hike up and back yourself) and you’ll be in Cape Town before the 23rd, you should buy your tickets online in advance. Note also that the cable cars often don’t run when the weather is bad.]

Speaking of the Weather...

Capetonians (yes, that’s what they call themselves) are fond of noting that Cape Town has four seasons and that you can sometimes experience all of them in one day. We’ll be there in winter, so unlike some of YASC’s previous trips to Ghana or India or Cuba or Brazil, the weather will be cool, sometimes even cold. The best advice is to bring layers and plan to shed them as the day goes on. It might even rain.

Rain? Yes, please!

You can’t bring up Cape Town these days without talking about the terrible drought they’ve been experiencing. Many of you have expressed concern about the drought’s potential to disrupt our trip, and I hope that my earlier email has allayed those concerns. In a nutshell: our local partners in Cape Town do not expect it to unduly affect our visit. For one thing, winter is Cape Town’s rainy season. For another, our hotel has access to its own river as well as to a formidable rainwater collection system from which they are able to draw water. And they are located over a natural spring from which they can also draw ground water for their operations.

What we are likely to experience is the normal (I say normal because those of us who live in California are well used to them) water-saving restrictions and admonitions. So, in bathrooms throughout the city you will become familiar with the mantra “If it’s yellow, let it mellow.” And in your hotel room you will be asked to request that towels and sheets not be changed every day and to limit your shower to two minutes.

To help with that, some enterprising local radio dj’s persuaded some of South Africa’s pop stars to re-record their songs in two-minute versions. The idea is that

you start the song, hop in the shower, and finish up before the song ends. You can download the songs here and get a jump-start on practicing water-wise washing up.

<https://2minuteshowersongs.com>

A couple you might be more familiar with are Ray Charles's *Hit the Road Jack* (coming in at exactly two minutes) and Elvis's *Heartbreak Hotel* (which is 2:07 so wait to turn on the shower until Elvis finishes singing the words "...at the end of Lonely Street"). If you know of any other 2-minute wonders, send them in and we'll share them with the group.

As for our time in Philippi, we will have plenty of water on hand for drinking. We are looking at some solutions (no pun intended) that do *not* involve disposable plastic bottles.

I Believe I Can Fly

You are responsible for booking your own international flights to and from Cape Town!

Some of you may have already booked flights. If you're on the pre-trip to Victoria Falls, then you've received instructions from our ground partner Spirit of Africa as to where and when you need to arrive.

For everyone else, we will be expecting you on Thursday July 26. Most of the connecting flights to Cape Town from the U.S. seem to arrive late in the day, and so it is likely that we will run the shuttle bus from the airport to the hotel in the early evening. Watch for details in the next newsletter.

If you're planning to arrive earlier in the day, note that the hotel cannot guarantee access to your room before 2:00 pm.

The service program will end after breakfast on Sunday August 5. Again, if you're going on one of the post-trip extensions, you will already have received your flight booking instructions. For everyone else, you may safely book flights for anytime that day. There is no guarantee that the hotel will allow late checkouts, but they will undoubtedly be able to store your luggage if you have a late departure.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to negotiate a discounted group rate on any airline. But South African Airways (which tends to have the most direct—but also the most expensive—flights from the U.S) has indicated that they will try to find the best possible fare for anyone from our group. Call 800-722-9675 and tell the rep that you are part of a Yale group of volunteers going on a humanitarian trip to Cape Town and ask them to search for a good fare for you.

Emirates is another airline that flies to Cape Town. All of its flights from the U.S. make a stopover in Dubai. Often it's a long layover. If long enough, the airline will provide you with a free hotel room for the night and van service to and from the airport. For our advance trip last September I flew from Los Angeles on Emirates and, while it wound up being a very long trip, I did get to spend some time exploring Dubai in the evening before connecting to Cape Town in the morning. The Emirates seats in coach are some of the most comfortable I've ever experienced.

Another option is to fly to Johannesburg where it is easy to pick up a connecting flight to Cape Town. There seem to be more flights from the U.S. to Joburg than to Cape Town, so that may be an attractive alternative.

Visas and Passports and Shots (Oh my)

Good news! If you're a U.S. or Canadian citizen, you don't need a visa to enter South Africa. What you do need is a valid passport and it must have at least one blank page. Actually, strictly speaking, you need two blank facing pages. That's what South African law says, although the requirement is rarely enforced. So, if you only have one, you'll probably be fine but you'll be taking a risk that you'll run into a particularly persnickety immigration official.

And more good news! There is no malaria in Cape Town and, unless you are coming there directly from a country in the "Yellow Fever Belt," there are no immunizations required by the South African government in order to enter the country. That being said, we advise that you consult your own health care provider for definitive advice. And the Centers for Disease Control's website has useful information on what preventative steps you might want to take:

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/south-africa>

You're in good hands...

We always recommend that you obtain a trip insurance policy to protect yourself in the event that illness or some other calamity forces you to cancel your trip. The fees you've paid to YASC for the trip are now non-refundable even in the case of illness, so protecting yourself with insurance makes sense.

We will be providing everyone with a group medical emergency assistance policy, but that is just what it sounds like—help in the event of a medical emergency while we're on the ground in Cape Town. For other medical problems, you will want to double-check your own health insurance policy to see what the coverage is overseas.

“I’m ready for my close-up Mr. Aleixo...”

If you haven’t already, please send your photo to João as soon as possible. You can email it to him at the address below. We are compiling a directory of everyone that we will be sending to all of you in advance of the trip. This is one “face book” that you will definitely want to be a part of.

And, while you’re at it, **get your signed release forms to João** as well. We cannot let you join the trip without those forms signed, sealed, and delivered. You can email them or fax them to 203-432-8144.

We will soon be assigning people to project teams based on the preferences expressed in the registration form.

Announcement of those teams and more in the next newsletter!

Salani Kakuhle!*

**Goodbye and stay well!* in Xhosa, the main local language of the residents of Philippi
[More Xhosa lessons in the next newsletter]

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