# Kromdraai Origins Field School at the Cradle of Humankind, South Africa

# Program Information

## PROGRAM SPECIFIC FIELD CONDITIONS

**What are the average weather conditions during the time of the field school?**

Generally, July daytime weather should be predominantly pleasant, meaning cooler mornings and evenings, with sunny and warm daytime temperatures averaging about 68 F. Most days are sunny and dry, so you should be prepared to work outside in the sun all day.

**Please describe the site(s) where the students will work, for example, outside and/or inside; in a city, town or rural area; shady or sunny, etc.**

The site is a collapsed cave that is exposed to the elements. It is in an open field-like area, up a slight hill within the greater Cradle of Humankind Landscape. Students will have the opportunity to make very real contributions to our understanding of human evolution and specific hominin species such as *Palanthropus robustus* and *Homo erectus*. The project seeks to identify and date more examples of early hominin species so we can better understand the development of hominins and the relationships between species. Students will be trained in archaeological methods like GIS and site mapping, geoarchaeological sampling, and phylogeny.

**Are there special features of the program site?**

The location of the site in the Cradle of Humankind provides an unparalleled opportunity to experience and become immersed in billions of years of organism evolution. Littered on the path to site are stromatolites- sedimentary rock formations built by colonies of bacteria, billions of years old and some of the earliest evidence of life. By standing in one position at the site, you can literally gaze over eons of evolution on this planet.

**As part of the program, students will be staying at the Kromdraai Guest House with Dr. Jose Braga**, which is owned by a young Afrikaans couple, so there will be a lot of opportunity for informal discussions. **On the first day (monday), students will join Dr. Braga at the University of Witwatersrand to tour the famed Fossil Vault which is part of the Evolutionary Studies Institute.** As mentioned, the site and the Guest House are located within the UNESCO World Heritage landscape of the Cradle of Humankind.

**Will there be other people onsite with the field school or working in the same area?**

Other researchers from Europe, Australia and the USA, along with local staff, will be working with us at Kromdraai.

**What does an average week look like?**

A typical workday would consist of work on the site from 8 am- noon, followed by a break until 2 pm for lunch and rest. On site, students will excavate fossil-rich deposits to identify hominin and as well as animal specimens, geological formations and samples, and other features related to cave morphology like speleothems. Students will also be wet and dry sieving all their

material, taking notes, documenting and mapping finds, working with the total station, and making photogrammetric models. Work will resume on site until about 4.30 pm, well before sunset. Participants will then have some down time and a short session in the field lab. During lab time (which is located on the guesthouse property) students will be processing fossils by cleaning, sorting, recording, and in some cases identifying them. Before dinner at 7 the group will meet to discuss progress from the day, concepts, questions, ideas, and themes from readings and course material. After dinner students will be free to relax and socialize.

On weekends, we take time to relax while also engaging in group discussions and debrief sessions, providing opportunities to share information, exchange ideas, and reflect on our work.

We also conduct **training activities—particularly in photogrammetry and GIS—to learn how to produce detailed maps of the site** and strengthen our technical skills.

Some team members enjoy the landscape and engage in activities like running, while others may choose to visit the nearby game park.

**What are the options for students to access money? Are there ATMs nearby? Should students plan to bring a certain amount of cash?**

An ATM is located 3 km away, but it's advisable to bring some cash in case the machine is out of service. Additionally, if no car or driver is available, those needing to withdraw cash will need to take an Uber.

**ACTIVITY LEVEL & ACCESSIBILITY**

**Please provide information about the physical requirements of the program.**

Although the distances are not long, you will be required to walk about .5 mile slightly uphill to reach the Kromdraai site, therefore the ability to walk this distance on a daily basis is required. Sterkfontein Caves has a series of steps to enter and exit. Although the cave is well-lit, you will need to crouch and walk on uneven cave surfaces for tours and activities. Excavation work in general may involve difficult conditions, uneven terrain, unanticipated natural hazards, use of digging equipment, and manual labor. A general level of fitness is necessary for excavations, and calls for walking up and down steps and inclines, kneeling, filling and carrying buckets of soil and stones. All outdoor activities are subject to the weather.

**Please comment how accessible your site is for people with mobility challenges. Would someone using a wheelchair be able to participate? Someone who uses crutches or other assistive walking devices?**

>Unfortunately, this will not be possible due to the site's rural and rugged terrain. The area lacks the necessary infrastructure to accommodate wheelchairs or assistive walking devices, making accessibility highly challenging.

The hike to site may be moderately strenuous for those that are not physically active, but everyone is free to go at their own pace. The long grasses can be a bit tricky, as they can obscure sharp stones and holes and may be slippery at times. Caution is necessary. Snakes have been found in the grass before but are not common. Participants can also be driven in one of the project vehicles. The ride is bumpy but short and can bring students right to the edge of the site.

**PROGRAM COUNTRY & CULTURAL INFORMATION**

**What do you love about the country and area you work in? What do you think students will be most excited to discover?**

The area features a rich history and natural beauty, with rolling hills and diverse wildlife. Its remarkable fossil heritage is renowned worldwide, making it a truly special place to work.

Students will likely be most excited to explore the fossil sites firsthand, uncovering evidence of early human ancestors in their original context. The opportunity to engage in real fieldwork and immerse themselves in this unique environment will make for an unforgettable experience.

**Primary languages spoken by people in the area:**

English

**Are there cultural aspects that students should be aware of before they come, particularly behaviors that could be offensive or misinterpreted (for example, eye contact, dress, gestures)?**

Overall, being polite, open-minded, and willing to learn from the local community will help ensure a positive and respectful experience. In this rural area, casual clothing is appreciated. A handshake is a common form of greeting, but some people may prefer less physical contact. It's always best to follow the lead of locals. Additionally, being overly loud in public spaces may be seen as disrespectful.

**What cultural enrichment opportunities are students likely to have outside of the program?**

Students will likely visit Sterkfontein Cave with Dr. Braga with an underground, in-depth tour of the dark and mysterious Sterkfontein Cave system, and learn about the cave's geology and paleontology. This is where famous hominid fossils were found, including Mrs. Ples and the Silberberg Grotto where work continues at the site where the almost complete Australopithecus fossil called Little Foot was unearthed.

Another major draw will undoubtedly be the nearby wildlife parks and conservation lands. There is a lion safari park about a 30-minute drive from the guest house, where students can have a multi-hour fully immersive tour for about 80-100 USD. Bothongo Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve is about a 10-minute drive from the guest house. The guest house is also located on private farm land, pastoral and stunning in nature. Students can safely walk in the gated farm lands before sunset.

**ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS**

**Please describe student accommodations.**

Students will stay at Kromdraai Guest House, located approximately half a mile from the Kromdraai dig site. Accommodation is very comfortable, arranged with two students per room, and each room includes a private ensuite bathroom. **The guest house offers a warm, welcoming atmosphere that truly feels like a home away from home**, with a nice garden, two comfortable living rooms and a shared kitchen where students can relax and unwind together. The food is excellent, and the owners are exceptionally kind and attentive, always willing to help and dedicated to ensuring that everyone feels comfortable and well cared for throughout their stay.

**Please describe how/how often students can do laundry.**

If students would like to have their laundry done, the fee is R120 (approx. $6.50)

**How are room assignments made? If rooms are assigned according to gender, how will you assign rooms for non-binary, trans and queer students?**

No room assignments. Students may choose their own roommates.

**Are there options for single rooms? Would there be an additional charge (and approximate cost)?**

Yes, a single room may be possible for an extra fee of approximately $175, depending on the actual cost difference between a double and single room, and the exchange rate. If you want to request a single room, please contact us well in advance of the program.

**Will the program provide meals?**

All meals are provided.

**Please describe typical meals that are offered by the program.**

All meals are home cooked on premises and contain a variety of meats, breads, vegetables, and drinks. All meals are formal, plated and served in the large dining room. Breakfast is at 7 am and consists of fresh fruit, yogurt, some kind of egg dish like an omelet or frittata, toast with jams, and sausage or other meat. Coffee, tea, water, and juice are freely available. A “light” lunch is served around noon consisting of more fresh fruit and sandwiches, with veggies and/or meat. Dinner is served around 7 pm and is by far the grandest and heaviest of all. It consists of a salad and a meal of some kind of meat (grilled fish, pork chops, ostrich steaks), a grilled or cooked vegetable (shish kabob, onion rings), and a starch like fried potatoes, mashed potatoes, or rice. There is always dessert, like homemade cake and ice cream. All meals can be made vegetarian.

**If the program can accommodate different dietary needs, please indicate:**

Vegetarian (dairy OK)
Vegan
Gluten free

**TRAVEL (TO AND DURING THE PROGRAM)**

**If students will fly, what airport should they fly into?**

OR Tambo, Johannesburg, South Africa

**Where will you meet students? If not at a primary arrival point, like an airport, how should students get to the meeting point?**

All students must schedule their arrival at Johannesburg airport for **one day before the program start date, preferably by noon**.

If you are arriving on a **late evening flight**, please plan to arrive **two days before the program start date** and stay overnight at an airport hotel. You can then travel to Kromdraai Guest House the following day (one day before the program starts).

The simplest and most convenient way to travel from the airport to Kromdraai is by Uber, which is very safe. Students are encouraged to coordinate in advance to share rides and reduce costs.

**José Braga will meet all students at Kromdraai Guest House one day before the program start date to welcome them and ensure everyone is comfortably settled in.**

**If the field site is not close to student accommodations, how will students get there? How long does it take?**

Walk or drive via project vehicles. Accommodations are less than ½ mile from the site

**PACKING LIST**

**Required**

Kromdraai and Sterkfontein are at an **altitude of 1470 meters**, with a temperate climate with **cool evenings and nights**. Please bring:

- Comfortable clothes for the excavation.
- Sun hat
- Sunscreen
- Camera
- Notebook
- Medications (labeled in original packaging, and enough for the entire program duration)
- Toiletries
- Insect repellent (optional)
- Water bottle. Water purifiers aren't needed
- Sunglasses
- Comfortable outdoor shoes/hiking boots

- Coat or sweater
- Clothing (mix of cool and hot weather).
- Canvas work or garden gloves (important!)
- Cold weather hat and gloves
- Identification/passport
- Travel documents
- Credit/Debit card
- Extra glasses/contacts if worn

**Note:** You will not need excavation tools, and we advise against bringing them

**MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Instagram: jose_braga_kromdraai

Documentary “Kromdraai : Children of the Cradle of Humanity”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R4_RLbfzS0&vl=fr