



GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT STUDIES INSTITUTE

GESI PRE-DEPARTURE PACKET

SUMMER 2019 | COSTA RICA



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Welcome

Dear GESI Student,

Welcome to the 13th annual Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI)! GESI began with the idea and perseverance of an undergraduate like you. It has since grown from a small experiential-learning program in Uganda exclusively for Northwestern students, into a nationally recognized model that has trained and sent over 650 students from almost 100 colleges and universities to 13 countries for community development work.

GESI offers students the unique opportunity to apply their classroom learning toward addressing global challenges. Students will spend their time abroad working with, and learning from, our community partners across the world. Northwestern University provides students with comprehensive preparatory coursework and training, ensures a structured and supported in-country field experience, and facilitates critical post-program reflection.

This program will challenge you to think and act differently. To create change you will need to listen, ask questions, and build relationships, not merely provide solutions. We trust you'll approach GESI with the respect, curiosity, and humility requisite to understanding people, their talents and challenges, and the role you can play to support positive social change.

GESI is one step on a path toward your personal, professional, and leadership development, as well as your understanding of complex issues of consequence to the planet and its people. Throughout the program, our professors and student instructors will be in contact with feedback and encouragement; during Final Summit, they will help debrief what you've learned. Even after GESI, our staff will be a strong support system as you use your own unique skills and passions to live lives of global social change.

We have seen this program make a tremendous impact on students' academic pursuits, career paths, and worldview, as well as their skills in cross-cultural communication, project management, and collaboration. We are excited to join you on this journey and to see where it leads. Get excited!

Best of luck,

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Program Information

The Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI) is a study abroad program that provides undergraduates with the knowledge, tools, and experiences to confront shared global challenges. Through service-learning in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Guatemala, Uganda, or Vietnam, teams of students join the efforts of local organizations to advance community-driven change.

GESI was created in response to undergraduates' desires to understand global challenges through an academic lens, and then put that learning into action. The result is an interconnected set of initiatives across several key areas: community-engaged scholarship, project and research funding, and professional development. Learn about the full history of GESI on our website: gesi.northwestern.edu/about/history

Who does what in GESI?

GESI is a program, not a physical institute. Whether or not you are a Northwestern student, the "acronym soup" that surrounds GESI is often confusing. It is important for you to understand the difference between each organization that helps make GESI happen so that you can communicate it effectively to your friends and family, and so you know where to turn for support (now and in the future). There are numerous partners who make important contributions to your academic, cultural, and personal experience in GESI.

Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute

At Northwestern, the Buffett Institute is the office that runs GESI. We include people you've met or spoken with when applying to the GESI program, and others that you'll be meeting along the way:

- Diego Arispe-Bazan and Paul Arntson, GESI Instructors
- Patrick Eccles, Corey Portell, Jessica Smith Soto, and Hà Nguyen, GESI Staff

The GESI team supports you before, during, and after your trip, in the following ways:

- **Program Arrangement and Logistics:** GESI works with the on-site teams to make arrangements for your trip. We also provide you with lots of information and support you during the program application phase.
- **Pre-Departure Orientation and Materials:** GESI provides you with important information about your program to help you prepare for your experience. This includes resources, such as this packet, and in-person meetings related to health, safety, budgeting, travel, and academics, as well as Canvas resources and assignments.
- **Academic Coursework and Credit:** GESI is responsible for organizing all Northwestern coursework.
- **In-Country Support:** Your on-site team will provide support for you while abroad and should be your primary resource, but if you need additional assistance or would feel more comfortable approaching GESI staff with any matters experienced in-country, please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Ozaroski, Assistant Director, or Patrick Eccles, Associate Director.
- **Reintegration Support:** Upon your return, we will provide you with resources to help you transition back into campus life, as well as connect you with other returnees and opportunities.

Changing our worldview is an implicit goal of most service-learning programs. Unless we understand how political, economic, and judicial systems tend to favor one group over another, we will be unable to truly assist those in need.

Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning Across the Disciplines. Ed. Christine M. Cress, Peter J. Collier, Vicki L. Reitenauer and Associates. Stylus, 2005: Sterling, VA.

Program Partners

In addition to Northwestern staff, GESI works with a variety of people to run the program. All GESI partners have unique offerings based on their networks and development models. They each have a commitment to community-led development, provide exemplary health, safety, and logistical support to our students, and are well respected locally and internationally, including by our peer universities.

The GESI team works directly with the global headquarters of five partner organizations in six locations in order to manage the logistics and coordination of the program. These organizations have a long-standing history of preparing and hosting students in communities abroad. Our partners include:

- **Amizade** in Ghana
- **Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD)** in Bolivia and Uganda
- **Institute for Central American Development Studies (ICADS)** in Costa Rica
- **Kaya Responsible Travel** in Vietnam
- **Social Entrepreneur Corps (SEC)** in Guatemala

Each partner has a **site team** that consists of one to two local people who act as both your 24/7 on-the-ground student support, as well as the long-term relationship builders with their organization and/or an organization where you will work. These staff members will assist you in everything from in-country orientation to homestay placements, from work plan advising to community development consulting. Some site teams hire international coordinators who are not from the local community specifically for the summer to act as cultural liaisons.

In each location, regardless of partner organization, you will have a **supervisor** for the duration of your summer. This supervisor is employed by your **host organization** and will work directly with you and your team to learn about, plan, and develop your summer work. Your supervisor is most often a local person, though sometimes they can be individuals from other countries who have worked with the organization for a long time. More often than not, GESI teams will also work with other individuals who also work at the host organization.

Another key partner in your time abroad are your **homestay families!** While they may not contribute directly to your work, your homestay family relationships are integral to your success. Families offer invaluable perspectives on culture, tradition, history, and life experience in your host location and community.

We would be remiss if we did not include **members of the community** as partners in GESI. Community is a complex and multifaceted word you will consistently hear throughout the program. Who this includes (and excludes) depends upon the situation. We encourage you to think about this word and phrase broadly; in any given site, there are a wide variety of communities with whom you will interact. Sometimes who “they” are will be clear, sometimes it will be very murky. Remember that organizations and your supervisors are members of the community at large, as are the community members the organizations serve. Relationships are at the core of GESI partnerships; understanding, building, and maintaining them are how GESI defines success.

Learn more about GESI’s partners on our website at gesi.northwestern.edu/about/partners



Pre-Departure Academic Information

The core of GESI is the collaboration and relationship building that takes place through students' in-country work and experience. What makes GESI unique is how these interactions are shaped and understood through the rigorous preparation and reflection which provides an academic foundation for their fieldwork. Furthermore, students develop the analytical and interpersonal tools to engage, critique, and understand the challenges of community development at an international level. View program syllabi for GESI's required coursework, **Doing Development: The Theory and Practice of Community Engagement** and **Development in the Global Context: Participation, Power, and Social Change**, on our website at gesi.northwestern.edu/logistics/academics

What is experiential learning?

The following are definitions of various types of experiential-learning. GESI fits most closely into the "service learning" category, though the program incorporates elements of all of the below:

- **Volunteerism:** Students engage in activities where the emphasis is on service for the sake of the beneficiary or recipient (client, partner)
- **Internship:** Students engage in activities to enhance their own vocational or career development
- **Practicum:** Students work in a discipline-based venue in place of an in-class course experience
- **Community Service:** Students engage in activities addressing mutually defined community needs (as a collaboration between community partners, faculty, and students) as a vehicle for achieving academic goals and course objectives
- **Service Learning:** Students engage in community service activities with intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connect to their academic disciplines

Adapted from Cress, Christine et al. Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning Across the Disciplines. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2005.

What to expect at GESI Pre-Departure Coursework

The GESI pre-departure coursework at Northwestern University is an intense eight days of class. During Pre-Departure, you will often be in class from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. with breaks for meals. GESI alums will serve as student instructors, facilitating class activities and discussions. We will also have many guest speakers supplementing class lectures; **it is vital that you complete all course readings before arrival**. Some nights, we will assign additional (short) readings. You will need to discipline yourself so that you are able to complete these assignments and be alert and engaged for long days of class.

Below is a sample day of class. A detailed schedule will be provided upon arrival on campus.

9:00 - 12 p.m.	Lecture by Diego Arispe-Bazan on Intl. Development
12:00 - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Language lesson
2:00 - 2:30 p.m.	Break
2:30 - 5:30 p.m.	Lecture and group activities with Paul Arntson
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Guest speaker on your host country
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Dinner with group with discussion or on your own
7:30 p.m.	Back to hostel for evening reading and sleep

In-Country Academic Information

In-Country Assignments

We feel strongly that in a foreign context you should look to your local hosts for expert advice. Your interaction with GESI staff and faculty while abroad will be limited. Occasionally, GESI staff, faculty, or student instructors will reply to your weekly updates (and/or other deliverables, as outlined below) with comments, questions, cautions, or feedback. However, given that they are not in-country with you, their written feedback will be limited. Only you, your site team, and community colleagues can truly understand your situation and challenges in-country. Please note that GESI staff are always available to discuss any program, health, safety or other concerns you have.

You will be evaluated based on satisfactory submission of the following (through Canvas):

- 1. Work proposal:** This should be a maximum of two pages; initial proposals are due within the first few weeks abroad.
- 2. External work plan:** These are due at the same time you submit your work proposal. These should be a maximum of two pages and conform to the template provided. Many students will also be required to submit a budget along with their proposal and work plan, while others will have no budget, only proposal and work plan.
- 3. Weekly group reports:** These are due on each of the seven Fridays while abroad. Submit these online on your group's Canvas discussion board. Entries should be a maximum of one page and should answer the following questions:
 - What you accomplished the previous week
 - What you plan to accomplish in the week ahead and who is responsible for these goals
 - What are the barriers/challenges that you are dealing with in terms of accomplishing the work plan, and interacting with your organization, community and your team
- 4. Field notes:** You will be given a spiral-bound notebook upon arrival to campus. It is your responsibility to complete the essays and reflection activities outlined in the notebook each week. You will be assigned some prompts and be able to choose others from a variety of reflection topics outlined in field notebook. While we will collect these from you at the conclusion of Final Summit, you can choose to fold any page you do not want us to read and we will honor your request. We will mail the notebooks back to you after we are done reviewing them.
- 5. Final Reflection Summit Summary:** In order to share your work with your fellow GESI colleagues, you will complete a summary of your work, including your rationale, process, and assessment. This will be shared with all students at the Final Summit to guide discussions.
- 6. Evaluations:** Before you return to the US, the country site teams will complete a two to three page evaluation with you. You will also be required to submit a comprehensive GESI program evaluation electronically shortly after returning from GESI (date will be specified during Final Summit). Failure to complete the electronic evaluation will result in an "in-complete" grade appearing on your transcript until we receive your completed evaluation.

Note: There may be times when you do not have access to Internet or communications. If you are unable to submit any of the aforementioned assignments due to communications issue, do not worry. GESI staff and faculty are accustomed to technological delays and this will not be held against you as long as you submit any missing deliverables once your internet access allows for it.

Final Summit Academic Information

What to expect at the Final Reflection Summit

Upon returning from their host countries, students meet back on campus for a three-day Final Reflection Summit where we will reflect on some of the program's learning outcomes, including but not limited to:

- Understanding ethical, historical, political, economic, and/or social issues in relation to community development
- Analyzing multiple perspectives of the social issues at hand
- Taking responsibility for your own actions as they have an effect on society
- Contributing to society through the application of new field knowledge
- Appreciating ends as well as means
- Appreciating cultural pluralism and global connectedness, as well as their challenges and opportunities

In addition, GESI participants from all sites share and compare geographical experiences while processing their immersion and what it has taught them about global development challenges, culture, and themselves. Students will also consider how to respond to the GESI experience by networking with professionals who are creating social change in a range of fields.

What happens after GESI?

As the program closes, GESI transitions into the role of alum support. GESI aspires to help students lead lives committed to international social justice. For us, this means helping our alums find internships, jobs, or project support opportunities that allow them to continue engaging with the issues they care about most. You may always contact the GESI team for guidance and support.



Cultural Adjustment

Cultural norms and adjustment

Students will experience cultural differences and react to these differences (commonly referred to as “culture shock”) in a variety of ways. There is a lot of helpful literature related to the cultural adjustment process, including common themes and experiences, representing phases of highs (comfort and excitement) and lows (discomfort and anxiety).

It is also helpful to keep in mind that, just as you enter into a new place and experience adjustment, so too do your host organizations, host families, and host communities; be aware that your actions, habits, and words can impact those around you as much as those around you can impact you.

Your on-site teams will be the most important resources for helping you to navigate cultural differences and adjustment, but just keep in mind a few things:

- Culture shock is normal and however you experience it is normal.
- Intercultural adjustment not only varies by individual, but also by program. You may find that some of the traditional “low” phases may correspond with program excursions and produce a “high.”
- Culture shock can exacerbate other mental health challenges or conditions. If you have seen a therapist or psychiatrist for any mental health conditions within the past three years, be sure to indicate this on the required NU Health Assessment Form and meet with your doctor to discuss your condition in light of study abroad. If you require any special accommodations, be sure to discuss your situation with GESI well before departure, so that we can work with on-site staff to determine what—if any—provisions can be made.
- Be aware of what you are experiencing. If you encounter any difficulties or discomfort, which prevent you from participating and being successful, discuss this with your on-site team or GESI staff ASAP.

Encountering culture

For many GESI students, witnessing extreme poverty first-hand causes a great deal of culture shock. Encounters with beggars, for example, can be a deeply unsettling experience. Richard Slimbach offers the following advice:

“Begging may be a deeply flawed method of redistributing wealth, but letting ourselves lapse into callous indifference only injures our moral sensibilities. Whether to give or not to give ultimately must be decided case by case, because much depends on our knowledge of the particular beggar and the larger social context. We simply cannot give to all beggars but neither must we refuse all. Over time, our giving probably will be selective, biased in favor of those who provide some service. Instead of our “gift” reinforcing the notion that poor folk are simply welfare wards of wealthy westerners, it can become a legitimate and dignifying form of payment for services rendered” (Slimbach , p. 188).

Bargaining is another cultural experience that can sometimes overwhelm students. Yet bargaining can be the most enjoyable of experiences abroad and we hope you’ll learn to have fun with it! Remember that if you really want something, you should plan to pay fair price, not the lowest possible price. Bargaining can be a fun way to form relationships with community members. Just be careful not to pay high prices for basic goods because it may harm local people. If merchants can get premium prices for their goods and services from foreigners, they may be less likely to sell to their neighbors at lower, fairer rates. Your host family and site team are great resources from which you can learn what may be a fair cost for you.

Food for Thought

You are passionate about making a positive impact while abroad, yet short-term study abroad can have long-term negative impacts if the traveler and program provider are not thoughtful and reflective about their engagements abroad. These questions are meant to help you think about the unintended consequences of study abroad and foreign travel. Many GESI sites are located in areas frequented by general tourists throughout the year. We encourage you to reflect with your GESI groups, in your personal writing reflections, and whenever you travel abroad again. These questions can help us continue to develop programming that does not harm local communities.

Economic and Environmental Impact

- Upon arrival, figure out where your food/water/housing comes from. Do foreigners/tourists impose any hardship on local people, such as water shortages? What about garbage disposal and pollution? Is land being used for visitors rather than local needs?
- Does the economic impact of study abroad or tourism create economic inequality in the community? Do foreigners or local elites own or manage the hotels that students/tourists frequent? Are guides and drivers outsiders or wealthier members of the community? Do local prices go up as a result of the student visit? The giving of gifts can contribute to similar questions, however well intentioned—can nonmaterial gifts be given instead, or gifts to the community as a whole?
- Do student/tourist visits contribute to economies of dependency on outsiders, orienting those economies to pleasing or providing pleasure for wealthy foreigners rather than to local needs?
- Is there a season for foreign visitors to come to the area, such that student visits contribute to a boom and bust cycle in the local economy? Is there any way to mitigate this effect?

Cultural Impact

- Do outsiders' patterns of consumption contribute to problems in the community? The "demonstration effect" of students bringing high-end travel gear, lots of clothes, spending money easily on restaurants, giving gifts, etc. may create resentment, the perception of American students as wealthy consumers with no responsibilities at home (McLaren 2006), or the desire in local people (especially youth) to leave the community so they can make money to buy similar goods and services. Even traveling on an airplane or traveling away from home can create these problems among people who do not have that option.
- Are local people excluded from any of the areas where foreigners are encouraged or allowed to go?
- Are foreign visitors well-behaved and respectful in terms of the local culture? Do they dress in culturally appropriate clothing, or otherwise commit cultural offenses that will anger, distress, or shock people in the local community? Do outsiders see culture and the "authenticity" of local people as commodities to be consumed? What other cultural impacts result from outsiders' visits? Cultural differences in themselves are likely sources of confusion and conflict in unanticipated ways.
- Do foreigners smoke, drink, or do drugs during their visit? The effect of these behaviors can range from being poor role models for local youth to bringing new addictions to the community.
- Do students/tourists demonstrate other expressions of privilege during their visit, such as doing things "our" way, eating "our" food, playing "our" music, requiring things to be done on "our" schedule?

Identity Impact

- How well are students prepared to understand the community they are visiting? Do they bring damaging stereotypes that can be countered throughout the program? These might be as narrow as "Bolivians" but for most students are more likely to be broader such as "poor people", "indigenous people", or "people in developing countries", as well as racist and exoticizing images of people in other countries.
- Are there human rights issues already present that are exacerbated by the presence of foreigners?
- Does anything about the students' presence or activities reinforce a negative self-image for local people, for example that Americans are smarter, more competent, more attractive? Is there any way their presence could promote a positive self-image instead?

Make the Most of Your Experience

To mitigate potentially negative impacts, we encourage you to honor the host community's independence and encourage self-reliance; to never impose your personal agenda when working with the community; to respect local people's visions and opinions above your own; and to be vigilant of any cultural impacts you might be having and adjust your behaviors and actions as necessary. Here are some additional tips to make the most of your time abroad and to leave a positive impact:

Be Present

- Engage in every activity fully, remaining mentally and emotionally present. Consider going unplugged, leaving technology like laptops aside as often as possible. While technology can be helpful to keep us connected to our world and people at home, many times it ends up restricting our ability to immerse ourselves in the local community or interferes with our ability to make ourselves available to the people right in front of us. Think about ways you will travel abroad with technology and still remember to look up.
- Recognize the value of play and lightheartedness in cultivating friendships.
- Observe, listen, and inquire rather than criticize, rationalize, or withdraw.
- Risk making mistakes.

Own the Power of Your Words and Actions

- Question your and your peers' use of words like "authentic", "real", "rural", "indigenous", and "traditional". ("To suggest the life of a rural citizen is any more or less "real" than that of an urban citizen of the same culture is condescending and can indicate a disturbingly colonial nostalgia for a cultural experience laden with pre-development realities") (Johnson, 184).
- Practice culturally sensitive photography: always ask first. Be especially mindful of children, who are often readily photogenic. Photos of children are sometimes easily taken as we seek to document memorable experiences in the community, but be careful and considerate when taking kids' photos.
- When confronted with a language barrier, speak English as little as possible. Expand your vocabulary, if necessary, actively engaging community members with nonverbal communication.

Keep an Open Heart, an Open Mind

- Take advantage of opportunities to interact with people who are different from you.
- Keep an open mind and heart but avoid romanticizing your experiences in host communities. Remember that below the surface of a seemingly homogenous social structure are power hierarchies, conflicting interests, and patterns of discrimination and exclusion.
- Be a listener, more than talker; a learner more than teacher; a facilitator more than leader.
- "Go slow. Respect People. Practice humility, and don't condescend with your good intentions. Make friends. Ask questions. Know that you are visitor. Keep promises even if that means mailing a photograph a few weeks later. Be a personal ambassador of your home culture, and take your new perspectives home so that you can share them with your neighbor" (Potts, 2008).

Stay Flexible, Mindful, and Adaptable

- Do not try to replicate the U.S. in your host community; avoid demanding the services you would expect at home. Observe the way things are done locally, refrain from judgment, and when you feel yourself getting irritated or judgmental, take a step back and try to understand why the local people do things differently from the way you are accustomed. Speak with local people to understand their viewpoints, listen to be surprised so that your own assumptions are challenged.
- Avoid the "theme park" experience, the places that were clearly designed for foreigners' amusement.
- As you meet people and form strong relationships with your hosts, remain curious about the larger global, national and local structures that exist, that recreate the poverty and inequality you are trying to grasp. Global learning must reach in both directions—toward persons and structures.

When Things Get Tough

Stop complaining and start reflecting!

When you catch yourself complaining, ask yourself: Can we—both hosts and guests—learn to adapt to each other? Can our differences be a source of mutual enrichment rather than separation? When we discover that things abroad are profoundly different from things at home, our natural tendency is to flee away from them. Instead of seeking to understand why certain practices irritate us, our immediate impulse is to simply spurn them as primitive and uncivilized, even immoral...

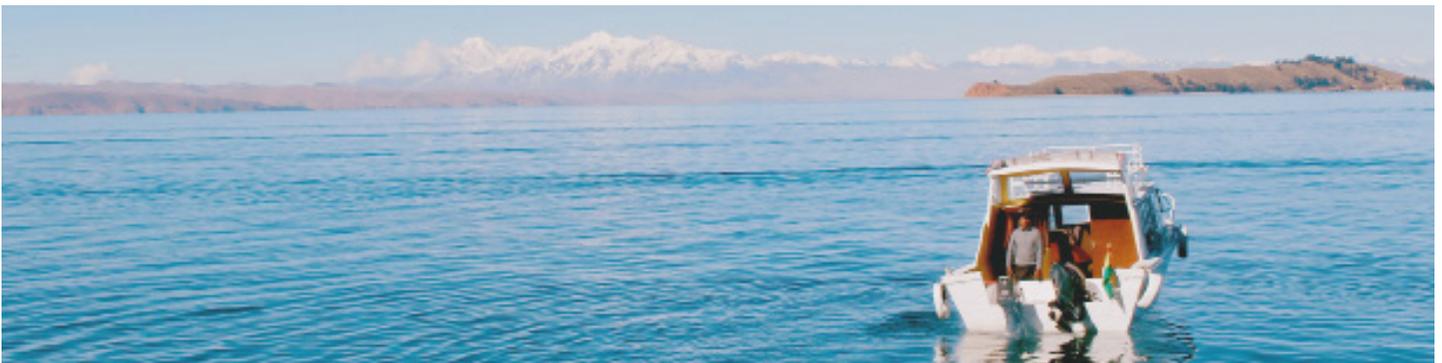
"Doing so justifies our escape from the culturally disagreeable environment into behaviors where we can feel protected and affirmed: calling home frequently, sleeping either too much or too little, reading romance novels, blogging or listening to music for hours, movies...We may not 'return home' in a physical sense, but psychologically we're a world away." (Slimbach, 158-160)

Get out your journal

Writing in an analytic mode helps us to calm down, gain some objectivity, and ask the critical questions: What provoked this reaction from me? How do local people interpret this act or event? And what does my reaction tell me about myself? Especially as we learn to put personal experiences and reactions into a larger social and theoretical context, our writing takes on a distinctive character—one that joins personal expression with cultural analysis—and encourages a more rigorous cognitive process than is common in conversation. Use Open Letters to channel some thoughts, they're designed to provide an analytical space. If you have other thoughts you don't want to share, use a personal journal.

Think About the Six Skills of Intercultural Communication

1. Cultivating curiosity about another culture and empathy toward its members
2. Realizing that effective communication requires discovering the culturally conditioned images that are evoked in the minds of the people when they think, act and react to the world around them
3. Recognizing that role expectations and other social variables such as age, sex, social and economic class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence affect the way a people act and behave
4. Recognizing that situational variables and convention shape behavior in important ways
5. Understanding that people generally act the way they do because they are using options that their society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs
6. Developing the ability to evaluate the strength of a generalization about the target culture (from the evidence substantiating the statements) and to locate and organize information about the target culture from the library, internet, mass media, people, and personal observation and reflection



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Institute for Central American Development Studies
Instituto de Estudios de Desarrollo Centroamericano

PART II

COSTA RICA



Letter from ICADS

¡Bienvenidos!

Congratulations on your acceptance to ICADS! Undoubtedly, you have many questions about your upcoming journey to Central America. This guide contains information, some essential and some merely helpful, about what to do before getting on the plane. We hope that it answers your questions and makes your travel and life here a little less stressful. We know you have a lot to do prior to your departure, but please take the time to read it carefully.

Despite this introductory note, students often tell us that they wish they had realized just how important the following information is before leaving. Print it off, mark it up, and bring it with you! If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

We hope that you have as profound and enjoyable an experience abroad as possible. We hope that you will not forget the exceptional good fortune which enables you to have the support, resources and opportunity for such an experience at this stage of your life. And we hope that when the program comes to an end your Costa Rican hosts will be able to say about you, "this was a good (young) person. We're glad to have had this experience!"

¡Pura vida!



About ICADS

The Institute for Central American Development Studies (ICADS) was created in 1986 to fill the information gap in foreign policy between United States citizens and their government. In conversation with scholars actively engaged in research in Central America, we concluded that the best way to go about gaining a deeper understanding is through both rigorous academic study and social engagement with real Central American communities that are working to solve some of the most challenging problems of the day.

In today's increasingly connected and globalized world, we at ICADS believe that it is now more important than ever to understand the complex issues impacting the peoples of both the global North and South. Thirty years after the founding of ICADS, we remain committed to providing opportunities for language and cultural immersion through classes and community work, lectures and contact with "regular" Central Americans, who are the real experts when it comes to Central American life.

Educate

We seek to educate participants about Central America by teaching Spanish and by offering academic programs that utilize a theoretically critical perspective as well as hands-on experience to help students deepen insights into current social, political and economic realities and their effects on the environment and society, especially the poor and marginalized.

Support

We aim to provide support to organizations and communities throughout the countries where we work; especially to groups that have demonstrated a commitment to learning and/or are dedicated to social justice work in areas such as education, healthcare, human rights, anti-hunger issues, and environmental issues. We do this through regular donations and utilization of services.

Understand

To increase understanding of the region within a historical perspective; to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of root causes, forms and dimensions of underdevelopment and injustice; to stimulate critical evaluation of current development strategies, analyzing their effects on women, children, the poor, and the environment; and to search for alternative methods, policies, and strategies.



About Costa Rica

Land

Costa Rica is roughly the size of West Virginia, covering approximately 19,730 square miles (51,000 sq. km). It is a land of great beauty with a variety of tropical rain forests, cloud forests, mountains, volcanoes, white sand beaches and winding rivers.

Weather

Generally, Costa Rica is warm, with the higher elevations of the mountains being cooler. San Jose and the Central Valley typically experience warm days and cool evenings. The coastal regions are very warm, with the Pacific coast considerably drier than the Atlantic coast. The climate year is divided into two seasons: rainy (May to November) and dry (December to April).

History

The indigenous population of Costa Rica was quite diverse before the arrival of Columbus in 1502. The northern tribes were influenced by the Maya while the southern tribes reflected a connection with the peoples of South America. Because Costa Rica was not abounding in mineral wealth, it was largely ignored by the Spanish crown. Those Europeans who settled there were left much to themselves. As such, Costa Rica developed differently from the rest of her Central American neighbors. This difference is reflected even today in the language (Costa Rica is one of the few countries that still uses the "vos" form of address), government (a stable democracy that has been interrupted only three times in 150 years) and people with a strong European heritage. In 1821, Costa Rica, along with the rest of Central America, declared independence from Spain during a non-violent revolution. In 1824 Costa Rica became part of the Federal Republic of Central America until the collapse of that Republic in 1838, when it became a sovereign nation.

Government

Costa Rica is a democratic republic. Operating under the Constitution of 1949, the national government is divided into three branches: executive, legislative and judicial. Although the President remains the center of political power and activity, the powers of the Legislative Assembly are well developed and limit executive action more than in other Latin American countries. The 57-member, unicameral Legislative Assembly is elected concurrently with the President. Candidates for the legislature run on party slates in each province and not as individuals. Seats are apportioned according to the total vote received by each party's legislative list. Deputies serve four-year terms and cannot be re-elected for successive periods.

Economy

Costa Rica has a fairly stable and prosperous economy, an exception among Central American countries. Agriculture accounts for 20-25% of GDP and 70% of exports. Cash commodities include coffee, bananas, beef, sugar and other food crops. Other important industries include tourism, timber, food processing, textiles, clothing, construction materials, fertilizer and plastic products. Inflation, however, is about 22%, and one-fourth of the country is still impacted by poverty. Unemployment is officially reported at 4%, although much underemployment remains. External debt, on a per capita basis, is among the highest in the world. Eco-tourism is developing rapidly and becoming more important to the economy every year. The monetary unit is the colón (plural, colones). The exchange rate varies slightly every day; currently it is around 570 colones to the dollar.

About Costa Rica

People

The population is nearly 5 million with a growth rate of 2-3% per year. Most people live in the Central Valley highlands. Eighty-seven percent have a predominantly European heritage. Seven percent are European and Indian mixed. The 2% Black population is generally located on the Atlantic coast and descended from Caribbean laborers who came to build the railroad, settled and began working the banana plantations. They have a distinct culture from the rest of CR, often speak English and are generally Protestant. One percent of the population is Indigenous and another 1% is ethnic Chinese. There are also approximately 80,000 North American families that live in Costa Rica. A large population of Nicaraguans, both documented and undocumented, can also be found. Costa Ricans are known as Ticos for their habit of ending words with the suffix "tico" rather than the more common "tito." For example, in place of chiquitito (very small), a Costa Rican would say chiquitico.

Language

Spanish is the official language, although English is widely understood, especially in tourist locations. Creole English is spoken by the Afro-Caribbean population of the Atlantic coast. Several indigenous languages are still in use, but they are not widely spoken.

Religion

Roman Catholicism dominates the religious realm. Catholicism still claims a large majority of the general population and wields tremendous influence. There is, however, a growing Protestant movement, and secularization draws ever more people away from religious affiliations. Costa Rica is a diverse country, with many outside influences and multiple religions. In the capital, San José, you can find a variety of community religious centers including catholic churches, synagogues, mosques, chapels, amongst others; ask ICADS staff for a list of options.

Time

Among foreigners in Costa Rica, the phrase "tico time" is common to describe Costa Rican attitudes towards time and punctuality. Overall Costa Ricans are less strict about arriving on time than people in the United States, which can take some adjustment for students. Regardless of the cultural practice in general, however, it is our expectation that students arrive on time to all activities!



Health Preparations

GESI and ICADS are deeply committed to student health, safety, and well-being. Our experience in risk assessment and emergency response has enabled us to maximize safety and security for GESI students. We arrange medical insurance with full coverage abroad and emergency evacuation services, and we actively monitor international events that may affect students. We work in cooperation with a team of risk management and legal professionals to ensure comprehensive measures address potential health and safety issues while providing students with 24/7 in-country support. Learn more about health and safety during GESI at gesi.northwestern.edu/logistics/health-safety

As a GESI student, it is your full responsibility to identify and take all necessary health precautions prior to, during, and following the program. Please start your health preparations early, as some vaccinations must be administered as far as eight weeks or more before departure. Providing detailed medical advice is beyond the expertise of ICADS or GESI staff so it is very important to consult the resources below as well as medical professionals such as your doctor or local travel health clinic.

Resources

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Recorded information about health risks and precautions for international travelers: 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747)
- Country-specific traveler's health Info: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/
- Malaria Hotline: 404-332-4555

Topics to talk to your doctor or local health clinic about:

- Any pre-existing conditions. Please note that pre-existing conditions--even those that don't impact you on a regular basis in the United States--can flare up while in a new environment due to altitude, allergens, new food, etc.
- Symptoms of the most common illnesses contracted by travelers and appropriate treatment
- Medicines and supplies for preventing and treating common illnesses and maladies (diarrhea, dehydration, sunburn, food poisoning)
- Yellow fever and typhoid fever
- Malaria (if participants plan to travel to at-risk areas)
- Rabies
- Food and water-borne diseases

What happens if I get sick?

For serious illness that may occur during your program, there are public and private clinics and hospitals available in most areas. If you should become sick, please alert the site team and your host family immediately and they will ensure that you receive appropriate medical care.

GESI's cost includes comprehensive medical coverage through GeoBlue; your enrollment will be completed for you, and your member number will be provided to you at the start of the program.

The illnesses and medical issues you are more likely to encounter may require medical consultations and prescriptions that will generally incur an out-of-pocket cost between \$25 and \$100; these types of expenses are reimbursable through GeoBlue. Please plan for emergency medical expenses and seek reimbursement directly from GeoBlue. ICADS and GESI are not responsible for up-front costs or cash-related medical fees.

Safety & Security

ICADS and GESI never anticipate significant issues related to safety and security during the program, but we understand that emergencies sometimes occur. We have had experience dealing with a variety of issues for which we can prepare and respond to appropriately. During local orientation, students will hear from program staff about pertinent safety and security precautions specific to the area.

All of our sites are in safe areas. However, similar to any location in the US, certain common-sense safety measures must be taken (i.e. not walking alone at night or wearing expensive/flashy jewelry or clothing). We emphasize that the most important ways to stay safe are to exercise good judgment, to have a strong network of local contacts, and to have a strong awareness of the potential for harm.

ICADS will do its utmost to provide a safe environment and a responsive support system to you throughout your experience. We depend upon our staff to serve as a barometer of the local political, social, and economic climates. We depend on our participants to act prudently and to be receptive of instructions and suggestions regarding safety and security.

ICADS's responsibilities:

- A safe and secure host community. ICADS is run by staff and trusted colleagues who live locally and often have years of experience with us. While the political climate varies, we feel that our extensive local networks of host families and partner organizations provide us with a good barometer of the climate in relation to the safety of foreign volunteers.
- Inform you about safety and security in your host community through materials like this pre-departure guide. We equip you with the information and tools to be aware of the realities of your host community, to avoid situations that would put you at risk, and to manage these situations should they arise.
- Take you to a preferred medical facility in the case of an emergency.
- Support you logistically and emotionally through any emergency situation.

Your responsibilities:

- Follow the guidelines and rules your site team and host family provide; they exist to help keep you safe!
- Learn about the history and current events of your host country and community.
- Secure all recommended vaccinations.
- If you are a US citizen, GESI will register your travel with the State Department. If you are not a US citizen, you should register your travel with your home country's equivalent.
- Avoid volatile or risky situations (especially protests).
- Travel with someone you know, and avoid being out alone after dark.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Walk purposefully and act as though you know where you are going.
- Notify your site team of any incidents of harassment, illness, accident, or any other serious event as soon as possible.

The safety and security of our program participants and staff is our first priority. We have rigorous and conservative safety and security procedures, including triaged security measures for students (such as restricted travel, curfews, and buddy systems) should any emergent or potentially emergent event occur. Every site has an emergency evacuation plan (supported by our travel insurance partner) that identifies safe houses, identifies on-call transportation, and provides a variety of options for moving participants out of unsafe area via land and air routes. The vast majority of safety and security incidents are those of petty crime, such as leaving a bag on the table and returning to find it missing and of street harassment, which will be discussed during Pre-Departure and at your on-site orientation.

Visa Information

The recommendations provided here are subject to change at any time. As a GESI student, it is your full responsibility to secure the appropriate visa and ensure the full legality of your stay in the host country during the program. To do so requires consultation of the following resources beyond the information provided by ICADS and GESI.

If you do not already have one, you should apply for a passport immediately. Due to the high volume of passport requests, the processing time could be up to four months! Costa Rica does require a passport for entry. You need to apply for your passport yourself. If you already have a passport, make certain that it is valid for at least six months beyond your return date.

Bring to Costa Rica two photocopies of your passport photo page, and keep them in a separate place from your actual passport. Upon arrival to ICADS, we will help you make an "official" copy of your passport, including your entry stamp. In your acceptance materials, you also received information in regards to visas; please read the information very carefully and fill out the accompanying letter to bring with you to show immigration or airline officials.

U.S. and Canadian citizens do not need to obtain a visa in advance, as you will obtain your 90-day tourist visa upon arrival at the airport. There is no cost.

If your passport is not from the United States or Canada, please contact ICADS immediately; additional procedures may be necessary to ensure your visa.

U.S. State Department: Information for U.S student travelers:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>

U.S. Embassy San Jose

Calle 98 Vía 104, Pavas
San José, Costa Rica
Phone: (506) 2519-2000
Fax: (506) 2519-2305
<http://cr.usembassy.gov>



Packing List

Pack light! San José is a large, modern city in which you can easily find many of the products you are used to such as shampoo, deodorant, feminine items, etc. If you find you've forgotten something or a new need arises, you will almost certainly be able to buy it. Bring only what you personally and individually are cheerfully willing to lug up and down several successive flights of long stairs by yourself. In fact, most students bring far more than they need. Lighten your load; you'll be happy you did. Also, if you would like to donate clothing, ICADS will help you find people who need it. You will be glad to have the extra space in your suitcase when you return!

Bring clothing for cool to hot weather. Costa Ricans dress casually, but overall are more formal than North Americans. Appearance is very important in terms of clothes. Shorts are great for sporting events and swimsuits are great for the beach but are NOT generally worn elsewhere. Plan on wearing nice but not elegant clothes. Remember: though you may visit the jungle or the beach on the weekend, San José is a city and people dress accordingly.

Clothes:

- 4-6 shirts (no spaghetti straps or cut-off shirts, please!)
- 2-3 t-shirts that can get dirty
- 2 long-sleeved shirts
- 2-3 jeans or capris (can be helpful in rain)
- 2-3 lightweight pants
- 1-2 shorts (finger-reach length)
- 1-2 skirts/dresses (finger-reach length)
- 2-3 button down shirts/nicer blouses
- At least one "nice" outfit (button-down shirt and pants for men, dress or a nice blouse and pants for women)
- A couple of sweaters, sweatshirts or a light jacket – because of San José's high altitude, some days can be quite cool.
- Raincoat: It rains for a couple of hours almost daily
- 2-3 Shoes for various occasions. Bring at least one pair of sturdy, versatile, close-toed walking shoes that you don't mind getting dirty. If you have hiking boots that cover your ankles, bring them. If not, we will provide rubber boots for field assignments. Sandals, slippers or house shoes are a good idea, too, since some kind of footwear is always worn in the house. Flip flops are not acceptable for class.
- Swimsuit

Health and hygiene:

- NOTE: Most toiletries such as shampoo, conditioner, tampons, lotion, etc. are readily available for purchase in Costa Rica.
- Small med kit containing enough Pepto-Bismol, Tylenol, and Immodium AD for two days
 - If you wear contact lenses, use prescription medication or allergy medicine, be sure to bring enough to last your entire stay with a copy of your prescription
 - Insect repellent (>25% DEET), in addition to your other toiletries

Practical supplies:

- Small backpack/daypack for day or weekend trips and class
- Umbrella
- Binoculars, if you have them
- Bath towel, travel towel and washcloth
- Sunglasses and/or hat
- Small lock for your locker at ICADS
- Notebooks and a folder for handouts
- USB flash drive
- Camera
- Laptop computer (suggested). A few desktop computers with internet access are available in the ICADS office; however, at certain points during the semester, these will be in very high demand. Having your own laptop will provide you with greater flexibility when it's time to write assignments.

Other:

- Photos of your family, friends, etc. to show your host family
- Small gift for your host family (not required, just suggested). Home decorations, things that are unique to your city/state, chocolates or useful things like towels or kitchen gadgets make nice gifts. It shouldn't be anything large or expensive, just a token of your appreciation. Please do not ask your family about things they'd like to have or if there is something you could bring from your home country. It wouldn't be appropriate and may create an awkward situation.
- NOTE about Voltage and outlets: like the US and Canada, Costa Rica runs on 110 volts and has type A and B plugs; therefore, North Americans do NOT need adapters. Hair dryers are not a problem.

Food & Water

Water

Even though the water is safe to drink in most places that we will visit, most travelers experience some problems with diarrhea. Generally, it lasts only a few days and can be easily and effectively treated. During orientation we will share more detailed information about health concerns. Above all, don't be frightened. This information has been provided to educate you about potential risks and to assure you that in almost every case, there are preventative measures and excellent treatments. We work hard to minimize any potential hazard, but occasional discomfort is part of traveling.

Food

Like many other Latin American countries, rice and beans are staples of the Costa Rican diet. A common breakfast is gallo pinto (a mixture of rice and black beans) with bread and coffee. Lunches and dinners may include rice, beans, chicken, plantains, potatoes, eggs or other items. Tortillas or bread and juice or sodas accompany most meals. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon coffee breaks are common. Fruit is plentiful in this country, but, apart from bananas and plantains, they are not an integral part of the diet. With the arrival of fast food restaurants (including McDonald's and Pizza Hut), lunches are becoming more hurried and are often eaten away from the home. A 10% gratuity is included in most restaurant bills and further tipping is not required.

While diets in the Central Valley are more varied, outside of San José students can expect to have rice and beans in some form or another for most meals. A typical breakfast dish is gallo pinto, which is rice and beans stir-fried together with spices. Another typical Costa Rican dish is the casado, common for lunch and dinner, which is a combination of rice, beans, salad, fried plantains, and meat.

Vegetarians and Vegans

Being a vegetarian is fairly easy in Costa Rica, as fresh fruits and vegetables are available year round. Being a vegan is slightly more difficult, as cheese and other dairy products are common, but if you are willing to be flexible and eat a relatively limited/restricted diet (rice, beans, fruit, vegetables), then you should do just fine.



Communication

ICADS believes that cell phones are not necessary to stay in touch with friends and family back home, or with friends and host families in Costa Rica, and we recommend that students see this experience as a way to “disconnect” from technology and engage a new cultural context. However, we recognize that many students and their families feel more comfortable knowing that they can easily communicate with each other, especially in the event of an emergency.

If you do decide to bring a cell phone, you can either add an international plan with your US provider, or purchase a Costa Rican SIM card. Using a Costa Rican SIM card only works with an unlocked phone and will give you a Costa Rican number. SIM cards are inexpensive (less than \$5), as are calling and data plans.

It would be valuable for students to discuss expectations regarding communication during the semester with family and friends prior to departure. Discussing each party's expectations beforehand can help avoid misunderstandings or conflicts. ICADS programs can be very demanding of students' time and energy; thus, it may be important for parents and loved ones to understand in advance that students may not be in constant communication. Phone conversations and email once a week might be a reasonable expectation. Parents' collaboration in helping students fully engage in this new culture can be a valuable contribution for a successful semester. Here is one student's comment about phone use:

“I was constantly talking to my parents and my boyfriend while in Costa Rica, and it made me miserable. I wasn't fully engaged in my experience, and whatever adjustments I was trying to make to my new context were severely interrupted by my use of phones and Skype. Looking back, I wish that I had done things differently. I recommend that ICADS students do not use international phones while studying in Central America.”

-ICADS Field Program student

There is no WiFi in the ICADS building. Internet access is available through our computer lab at the ICADS office Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, during the first part of the semester. Access to the Internet, however, may be limited or unattainable during the latter part of the semester, depending on the site of your internship/independent research. Internet cafés are inexpensive, but they are also limited. Students are encouraged to limit emails and online chatting as constant contact with home usually comes at a detriment to one's immersion in the local language and culture. Students should not expect (nor request) to have Internet in their homestay.

There are so many people to meet and places to go in Central America! We highly encourage students to be intentional about their use of social media while studying abroad. While we understand that these tools are now an important social connector for many people, ICADS encourages students to think hard about the role that social media will play while abroad. Here are some questions to consider: What role does social media play in movements for justice and sustainable development? How do networks like Facebook help to keep us connected to people we care about? How do these networks hinder our connections with people around us? Please take some time to think about these and other questions related to social media in regards to your time in Central America.

Money & Transportation

Money

GESI covers all of your necessary expenses, including room and board, in-country transportation, orientation and debriefing sessions. You may want additional money, however, for entertainment, snacks, books, gifts, newspapers, weekend excursions, additional transportation and health emergencies. Never carry a large sum of cash or your passport on public transportation; if you must, please do so with caution.

The Costa Rican currency is the colón (CRC). The easiest way to get colones is to withdraw them directly from ATMs with a debit card, though you should bring a small amount with you through the airport, but ICADS staff will take you to a local ATM on the first day of orientation. Bring a debit card, a major credit card, and cash in US dollars. It is IMPERATIVE that you bring a major credit card because people are normally required to present a credit card to pay a deposit before admittance to any hospital in Costa Rica. Furthermore, they are very widely accepted and allow cash advances in colones.

Make sure that you call your bank and credit card company to find out what foreign transaction fees they may charge and to notify them that you will be in Costa Rica so that they don't deactivate your cards. Also keep in mind that wiring money through a service like Western Union is quite expensive and should only be considered as an option in an emergency.

Expect to spend about \$200 to \$300, depending on your budget, personal spending habits, and weekend travel, to cover personal expenses. The following is a list of some things and their approximate costs:

- Lunch.....\$8 - 12
- Bus Fare to Central San Jose from ICADS.....\$1.00 or less
- Taxi to Central San Jose from ICADS.....\$5 - 10
- One Way Bus Ticket to the Beach.....\$7 - 15
- Hostel.....\$12 - 24/night
- Hotel.....\$20 and up
- Drink.....\$2 - 5

Transportation

When you arrive in San Jose, ICADS staff will be waiting for you at the greeting area of the airport upon your arrival. They will have a sign with them to signal where to go! After your arrival in Costa Rica, you will have a couple of options for local transport:

- Local buses - The bus system in San José is dependable, clean, and inexpensive. The buses run from about 5am to 10pm and cost about less than \$1.
- Taxis - Taxis are also readily available, and we strongly recommend that you take one after dark. Typically you can get anywhere in San Jose for \$5 - \$10.

Transportation to surrounding provinces. One of the many advantages of studying in Costa Rica is the relative ease with which one can travel to most parts of the country. Buses run throughout the day, and prices are reasonable.

ICADS students are expressly forbidden to ride in cars with people who are not members of our staff or are not home stay families. Our students must ride with us or must use public transportation or authorized taxis at all times. Due to the high rate of traffic accidents, students may not own, rent or drive motor vehicles or motorcycles during any ICADS programs.

Family Homestay

For the entire time that you are an ICADS student, you will be living with a Costa Rican family (one student per family). Your host family is located within walking distance or a short bus ride from ICADS/your host organization and will provide you with a room, breakfast, dinner, and laundry service. For all intents and purposes, they will be your family, and you should try to get to know them, do things with them, and love them. In fact, we strongly encourage you to spend more time with your Costa Rican family and friends than with other students in the program. This is one of the best ways to solidify your Latin American experience. Most students not heeding this later report wishing they had.

All of our host families are carefully screened by ICADS, and most have been with us for many years. Any families that do not receive rave reviews from our students are removed from our list, so the ones that remain are all exceptional. Host families are trained on the type of relationships that are expected between host family members and students; no inappropriate conduct is tolerated. We take great care to match you with a family according to your preferences, and all host mothers are accustomed to having students with special dietary needs.

You are PROHIBITED from inviting other guests to stay with you at your homestay.

Most of our families have been housing our students for over 3 years. In fact, many of them have worked for ICADS for more than 7 years! Students are never isolated from other classmates since host families are located in clusters, within a 20-minute walk or bus ride.

All ICADS families own the necessary basic things to live in a simple but relatively comfortable manner. They represent a vast majority of Costa Rican families. Many of them consist of single or divorced women who must look after their children and sometimes after other family members. Some of our families are just a one-member family, that is, women who are divorced or widows whose houses are generally more spacious. ICADS has chosen this type of families in order to make a contribution to very hard-working women. In any case, you will be living in a relatively small house but you will have a room for yourself and you will be the only foreign student living with the family. In most cases, you must share the bathroom with the rest of the family members.

ICADS host families have been screened and are constantly being evaluated. You are safe there. Your family takes very seriously the responsibility to keep you safe, and they are required to be in touch with ICADS about any potential dangerous situation.

All of ICADS families are very sweet and in their own different ways, they are very welcoming and have a lot of experience supporting foreign students. They do their best to make you feel at ease and to help you learn more Spanish. They expect you to ask questions and to let them know what you like and dislike in a courteous and respectful manner.

We want you to enjoy the hospitality of your Costa Rican family. Observing the following general rules and customs will facilitate the process. Remember that each family is unique but all have been selected with great care. They will love you as you love them.

Please keep in mind that each family has its own rules and you will be expected to follow them. Your initial attitude can really set the tone for family relationships. It may be natural for you to feel unsure or overwhelmed at first, but try not to let these feelings determine how you act. Courtesy, respect, honesty and responsibility are values that families expect from their students.

Family Homestay

Utilities & Services

All houses have electricity; therefore, they have access to basic appliances such as stoves, washing machines, ovens, TV sets, CD/DVD players and, in many cases, computers and Internet. Services such as electricity and phones are very expensive. You're expected to make very rational use of them.

- The price of heating water is costly and if you sing or dream too long in the shower, it is very expensive for the family.
- Please do not use the phone without permission. If you are given permission, please keep calls very short and use a local calling card at all times.
- Internet access might be available in your house; however, its use is restricted. The family will establish the rules. Students are expected to interact with the family as much as possible and not to isolate themselves in front of a computer.
- Showers have electrical heating devices that you must learn to operate/adjust in order to get warm water. Don't expect hot showers!

Hygiene & Manners

Costa Ricans tend to be very clean, therefore the houses can be very small but tidy! Some places are more humid or dusty than others therefore sweeping, mopping and dusting can be frequent activities in your house. Nonetheless, because of the tropical conditions of the country, ants, flies, small spiders, moths and roaches, even if unwelcome or undesirable, are fairly common.

- Never keep food in your room! Try to be tidy! Your host mother will have to clean/sweep/dust your room often and change the sheets at least once a week.
- Personal hygiene is of significant importance in Costa Rica. Everyone, local or not, is expected to take at least one daily shower.
- Because of septic tank systems, most bathrooms will have a basket next to the toilet where you should be throwing toilet paper, sanitary napkins, tampons, etc. You are expected *not to flush* any of these items.
- Most of the families don't like anyone walking around barefoot. It's considered unhealthy! For this reason, you should bring flip flops or slippers for use in the house.
- Don't put your feet up or sprawl all over the furniture.
- Costa Ricans, in general, like to handle everything with care. Try not to slam doors (in the house and elsewhere) or throw things around.



Family Homestays

Food, Meals & other Considerations

Your family will provide you with 2 daily meals: breakfast and dinner. Students are expected to try typical Costa Rican food, which at all times should be plenty and varied.

- If your family sits you down alone to eat, don't worry. It is because they do not want to bother you. If this happens, tell them that you would like to eat with them.
- For Costa Ricans, feeding people well is a demonstration of affection. If they try to overfeed you, feel free to ask them to serve you less. If you feel that you need help to deal with issues related to your eating habits, ask the host family coordinator for help.
- If you have to skip a meal, please let them know ahead of time. If you are not going to be home in time to have dinner with your family, please call them. Also, let them know if you plan to be away for the week-end. Call them if you will not be returning on schedule.
- The use of alcohol is a factor in the vast majority of incidents compromising students' safety. Drinking can put you and others in danger, and will definitively create problems or tensions with the host family. Families expect students to be respectful of their homes avoiding the use of alcohol.
- You may, if you wish, offer to do some work around the house as a way of integrating yourself into the household more quickly (help wash dishes, etc.). However, they do not expect you to do anything. You should never feel obligated to clean the house, babysit, etc.
- Costa Ricans generally hand wash clothes with rather abrasive detergent, which takes its toll on your clothes. Bring sturdy clothes and consider leaving expensive clothes at home. Women may be expected to wash their own underwear; ask your host mother where the "pila" is. Your host mother will show you where to put your dirty clothes. She will do the laundry at least once a week.
- Costa Ricans are very patient. If they speak too fast, you need only to ask them to please speak slower. They will slow down and will be supportive. You have to insist that you need corrections with your Spanish. Many Costa Ricans think correcting people is rude.
- Costa Ricans are often very conservative. They do not like conflict and are sometimes uncomfortable with intense discussions. It is best to discuss political and religious issues gently with your family.
- Light sleepers should consider earplugs. Host family houses are can be located in urban neighborhoods, where street noises might be quite annoying.

Visitors

It is not permitted to invite guests home who are not part of the program. For safety reasons, families in Costa Rica worry about having total strangers in their homes.

- If you wish/need to study with an ICADS classmate, always ask for permission. Stay outside of your bedroom or keep the door open. However, plan to eat your meals with your own host family. Never invite anyone to dinner unless your host mother has asked you to.
- Overnight guests are definitively not allowed: never bring friends or dates home to spend the night. It makes the family extremely uncomfortable.

We hope that you have a wonderful homestay experience in Costa Rica and that you continue in close contact with your Costa Rican family once the program is over.

Cultural Practices & Beliefs

At ICADS, we believe that learning implies going beyond a tourism mindset when it comes to getting to know the local culture. We strive to push students to consider the implications of their actions in the local cultural context; to observe, understand, and adjust their behavior in order to effectively develop relationships in their host communities.

Being in a new cultural environment makes it more difficult to read situations. Always trust your natural instincts and be aware that you may not be able to read cultural cues as you would in a familiar environment, even if you speak the local language. For example, the term machista or machismo is used frequently in Latin America. This means that male dominance and power is widely recognized and “accepted”. Females are typically the ones to do all the household chores, take care of the children, and provide emotional care for the family, the males are the workers that bring in the family income. This is not the case in all Costa Rican families, but we did want to advise you about this before your arrival to the country to be prepared to witness this machismo.

Show your respect to the culture with how you dress. You are coming to a tropical country, however, you are not on vacationing at the beach. You will be studying in the capital of a country and visiting important places and professional institutions. Dress appropriately and be respectful of the culture; look around you and see what locals are wearing to school/work. You will have an easier time being respected and recognized as a professional if at first you are conservative with your behavior, speech, dress, gestures, etc. Once you have established meaningful relationships in your community, you may start to dress down and be more casual. This is an adjustment we suggest so that students don't give off a bad first impression to the local culture.

If you travel with an open, positive, and humble attitude, you will be rewarded with warmth, respect, and generosity. Practice your Spanish with everyone and anyone, as Costa Ricans love when you make an effort to communicate in their language. Do not be too harsh on yourself and your language abilities, you will get there! Remember, the more willing you are to laugh at yourself, the better.

Make friends with the locals. Keep in mind that socialization patterns are different across cultures and the way one goes about developing and nurturing a friendship can be quite different from home. Your host family is a really good resource, take advantage of your time here and in-volve yourself in their activities!

Reflect. Consider writing a narrative about one memorable encounter, an event that stands out as an “Aha!” moment. By writing about day-to-day observations you can deepen your understanding of the underlying cultural system that gives sense to those events. What values, attitudes and assumptions inform that behavior? Try to discover the worldviews of those in the host culture. Challenge your definitions of discrimination and prejudice. What significance do these issues have for those in the host culture? (HINT: Be mindful of how your mere presence as an outsider may impact your encounters and interpretation of experiences.)

Explore the country. Make sure to sign the “sign-out sheet” when leaving for the weekend so ICADS knows how to contact you in case of emergency. Explore the area, see the sights, try new things, and get to know the people in your host community. How do they structure their lives? What concerns are they facing? What makes them happy?

Live like a local. With time and experience students learn to live like local students. Shopping, eating and socializing with local peers is surely the best way to control costs and to see and do things that you'd never have access to as a tourist. Avoid having an “tourist experience” in the vicinity of local events.

Show appreciation to host culture. Gift giving, thank-you cards and kind words are all possible ways to express your appreciation. Using the language appropriately, observing societal norms and expectations and following established protocols can also demonstrate your appreciation. (HINT: Take advantage of all the other ways you can learn and practice Spanish outside of the classroom.)

Cultural Practices & Beliefs

Greetings and Personal Interactions

Costa Ricans tend to be much more affectionate than typical North Americans and feel at ease with less “personal space” than you might be used to. This is reflected in both everyday conversation, where Ticos tend to stand closer together when speaking, and in greetings, where a kiss or a hug is common. When women friends or relatives greet one another, they lightly brush their right cheeks together and give a light kiss to the air. The same is true of men greeting women friends or relatives. Men greeting men, however, just shake hands. A few minutes spent chatting about family, work, etc., is polite and expected. For a first-time introduction, it is common to pat on the arm or for men to shake hands.

Dating and Friendship

We encourage students to develop friendships with Costa Ricans; however, we strongly discourage students from becoming involved in any romantic relationships while on the program. If you are coming on this program in hopes of finding a boyfriend or girlfriend, you need to reevaluate. This program is very intense and demands your full attention. In addition, dating is generally taken very seriously in Costa Rica. This can cause misunderstandings between Costa Ricans and foreigners.

Sex & Relationships

Remember that all the same risks in the U.S. and other countries exist in Costa Rica as well. If you choose to have sex, always protect yourself by using a condom.

Be as smart and mature as you would be in your home country about the decisions you make here on these issues. If you follow certain rules in the U.S. to reduce the risk of sexual assault (i.e. using the “buddy system” or always watching your drink), use those same rules here (and in recognizing that a different set of norms are at place in this culture, consider being even more cautious and adopting even stricter “rules” than you normally would have in your own culture). Many men and women make stereotypical assumptions about North Americans and other foreigners, specifically that they are rich and easy. Sometimes men will actively seek out a relationship with you because they are thinking exactly these things. We recommend that you always stay alert and trust your instincts, considering these stereotypes and contemplating all possible motives. Don’t put yourself in a situation where you could get hurt.

For more information about social activities, professionalism, and diversity considerations in Costa Rica, take a look at the Peace Corps guide for Costa Rica:

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/costa-rica/preparing-to-volunteer/living-conditions/>



Race, Sexuality & Gender

How you interact with others will initially have a lot to do with preconceptions. You'll feel more comfortable once the inevitable "getting to know you" period is over, but keep some of these cultural norms in mind.

Race and Ethnicity

Like all Central Americans, Costa Ricans have a mixed heritage of European, Indigenous, and African roots. The largest concentration of afro-Caribbean populations are found in the Caribbean province of Limón, while indigenous groups are largely concentrated in the southern part of the country near the border with Panamá. Costa Rica is home to smaller indigenous populations than most of its neighbors, and indigenous communities are often the most marginalized, with chronic lack of access to public services.

Additionally, for historical reasons, there is a prominent cultural belief that Costa Ricans are "whiter" than their neighbors. This means that discrimination towards indigenous peoples, afro-Caribbeans, and immigrants is common. Specifically, due to its border with Nicaragua and its higher standard of living, Costa Rica is home to thousands of Nicaraguan immigrants, who suffer many of the same stereotypes of immigrant populations all over the world (lazy, violent, uneducated, etc.). This discrimination is manifested both in overt and structural ways.

In contrast, due to Costa Rica's reliance on the tourism industry, most Costa Ricans are welcoming to visitors from the United States and Europe.

Sexuality

Costa Rica continues to be a relatively conservative country in terms of attitudes towards sexuality and sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ communities are finding increasing acceptance in the Central Valley and each year San José hosts a diversity march with growing attendance. However, marriage between same-sex couples is not permitted, and acceptance of alternative lifestyles outside of the Central Valley continues to be limited. Sexual education is taught to some extent in public schools, although some conservative sectors of society would like to see it limited or removed all together. Abortion is illegal in almost all cases, including pregnancy as a result of rape or incest; the only exceptions are when the life of the mother is in danger.

Gender

Like perceptions towards sexuality, gender perceptions are relatively conservative as well. While things are slowly changing, gender roles are typically traditional, especially outside of San José and the Central Valley; there is a culture of "machismo", as well.

You are entering a culture where gender roles may be more rigid and oppressive to women than in your home culture. Related to this, men will often whistle and hiss at women; it's a pain, but part of life here. Often times, the more skin you show or the lighter your hair, the more calls you will get. Generally, the harassment is only verbal. You can choose if you want to respond or ignore, although if you are alone on a street, it would be best to ignore and just walk quickly by. We recommend that students ignore men who hiss, whistle, or make comments to them. It's best to pretend like you didn't hear it and move along quickly. It also helps to walk tall, walk confident, and look like a tough person. Avoiding eye contact with men on the street can also sometimes help. Please feel free to talk over any issues at all with an ICADS staff member.

Note on Harassment

We would like to affirm that those who are harassed should not have to feel the responsibility to protect themselves against any type of harassment and that it is not considered their fault or responsibility to avoid it. It is important to note, especially when interacting across and between cultures, that facing harassment of any kind can be confusing. As such, site teams are well-suited to orient you to area norms (including safety precautions and local ways of being), offer a variety of responses (to harassment or other concerns), and are there to support you throughout your experience. Their suggestions come from a long-informed understanding of cross-cultural engagement and local information.

Reading Guide

Mamita Yunai by Carlos Luis Fallas is one of the most well-known Costa Rican novels and explores the influence of the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica in the early 20th century.

Única mirando al mar by Fernando Contreras Castro explores the life of a poor girl who lives in the city dump (it no longer exists, but the community it takes place in is very close to ICADS).

The Costa Rica Reader (ed. Palmer and Molina) is an excellent collection of short stories and essays about a wide variety of topics pertinent to the Costa Rican context.

Understanding Central America (eds. Booth, Wade, and Walker) is a great collection as well, with chapters on Central America in general and Costa Rica in particular.

La nación (www.nacion.com) is the largest Costa Rican newspaper.

The Tico Times (www.ticotimes.net) is an English-language online publication which often has interesting articles as well.

