



Organization for Tropical Studies



Tropical Diseases, Environmental Change & Human Health in Costa Rica

*Undergraduate Semester Study Abroad Program
Orientation Packet*

¡BIENVENIDOS!

*Bienvenido al programa de pregrado del OET
(OTS in Spanish is **O**rganización para **E**studios **T**ropicales)*

You are part of a unique opportunity for students considering careers in the environmental, health sciences, and health policy. We are confident that this semester will be one of the most challenging and fulfilling experiences of your college career. In Costa Rica, you will become immersed in the scientific and social aspects of tropical diseases. You will visit both urban and rural medical facilities operating within Costa Rica's public health system. You will also visit several indigenous communities in Costa Rica, and learn about their culture and the challenges they face, particularly those related to health. You will work in some of the world's premier tropical research sites, experiencing nature intimately. Finally, you will visit national parks, market places, and agricultural farms in order to immerse yourself in Costa Rican culture. During a visit in Nicaragua, you will experience another Latin American culture with a homestay in Masaya, enriched with cultural interactions that will challenge your dancing skills!! And, you will

develop your academic skills by having the opportunity to develop, write and present several research projects. You should expect to work hard, learn a lot, and also have fun!

This Orientation Packet contains important information to help you prepare for your semester in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Please read it carefully, follow its recommendations, and bring it with you to Costa Rica. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us at any time. Contact information is provided in this packet. We are looking forward to having you in our program.

¡HASTA PRONTO!

Table of Contents

¡BIENVENIDOS!	1
Sites to be Visited.....	5
OTS Education Staff for the Semester Program.....	6
Overview of the Program.....	8
Sites to Be Visited	8
La Selva Biological Station.....	8
Las Cruces Biological Station.....	9
Palo Verde Biological Station	9
San Pedro, San José.....	10
Masaya, Nicaragua.....	10
Academic and Student Life on the Program	10
Family Visits	12
Mid-Semester Break	12
Logistics.....	12
Passport and Visa Information.....	12
Airline Reservations	13
Money	13
Laptop Computers	14
Health Care	14
Medical Services	14
Counseling Services.....	15
Immunizations.....	15
Communication.....	18
Important Names and Numbers	18
Telephone	18
E-mail and Internet	19
Letters and Packages	19
Risk Management in Costa Rica.....	20
Managing Risk of Crime and Theft.....	20
Managing Risk in the Field	21
Managing Health Risks.....	22
Physical Health and Well-being	22
Emotional Health and Well-being.....	23
Alcohol and Illegal Drugs.....	23
Rest Days and Free Time.....	24

Women Travelers.....	25
Sexual Harassment.....	25
Racism and Racial Stereotypes	26
U.S. Embassy Support	26
What to Bring.....	26
Your Arrival in Costa Rica	32

Sites to be Visited



OTS Education Staff for the Semester Program Costa Rica Staff



Resident Faculty: Mauricio Lascano, Ph.D.

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Ph.D. Microbiology, Parasitology, and Tropical Diseases, Ohio University

Dr. Lascano's research interests are focused on various aspects of the biology and epidemiology of tropical infectious diseases, in particular Chagas disease, an infection that affects millions of people in Latin America. He is interested in the genetic variability of the populations of parasites and vectors and how it influences the role they play in the transmission dynamics of the infection. In exploring these research topics, he works to generate relevant scientific data that can be used by health authorities to design and implement adequate and effective control and prevention programs to deal with this disease. As an educator, Dr. Lascano has experience teaching a variety of courses, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, and leading educational trips abroad for students interested in learning about tropical diseases.



Resident Faculty: Zsanett Hajdu, Ph.D.

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Ph.D., Pharmacognosy, University of Szeged, Hungary

Dr. Hajdu is an ethnobiologist-pharmacognosist, mainly interested in the traditional use of plants and their biological activities. As an undergraduate student she lived together with different ethnic groups in Bolivia, and conducted an ethnobotanical field work in the Bajo Paraguá Indian Territory, Bolivian Amazon, which was the base of her academic life. During her Ph.D. work she focused on the isolation of new natural products from Latin American and Hungarian plant species with possible activity on the central nervous system, and also investigated dietary supplements as modern ways to use medicinal plants. She started her teaching experiences in Bolivia, giving lectures to both primary school students and teachers about the importance of the local plant species. Later she lectured the “Medicinal plants and drugs” practices for pharmaceutical students at the University of Szeged, Hungary, the same time giving presentations about ethnobotany, ethnopharmacology at the university and about the beautiful and important relation between people and nature in several forums. She got her Ph.D. degree in Pharmacognosy (2014) as well as my M.Sc. in Biology (2009) at the University of Szeged, Hungary.



Academic and Logistic Coordinator: Jessica Arias, M.Sc.

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M.Sc. Sustainable Development, Universidad de Costa Rica

Ms. Arias has a Master Degree in Sustainable Development with Emphasis on Biological Resources Conservation, with a base training on ecotourism. Her main research interest and future projects are related to agriculture; mainly the impacts of that activity in the environment, sustainable agricultural production as a way of local economies to adapt against environmental and climate change and family farming. She has also been involved in environmental education and conservation projects in biological corridors, working also in indigenous communities in Costa Rica.

OTS Administrative Staff in Costa Rica:



Director of Education

Pia Paaby, Ph.D.

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Ph.D. Tropical Ecology and Limnology. University of California-Davis

Dr. Paaby has focused her work on tropical aquatic ecology and natural resource management. During her professional career she has implemented the teaching model of OTS in Costa Rica with American and Latin American graduate, undergraduate, and high-school students. She was responsible for the original design and implementation of the local naturalists' course in Puerto Viejo near La Selva. Her professional background concentrated on mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and climate change into long term planning processes of governments and regional offices.



Undergraduate Program Coordinator

Adriana Baltodano, M.Sc.

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M.Sc. in Management and Conservation of Tropical Forests and Biodiversity. CATIE

M.Sc. Baltodano has focused her work on Climate Change adaptation strategies and landscape conservation. She has worked in the definition of water management strategies in areas vulnerable to climate change through water use perception and scenarios in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. She is also interested in landscape conservation strategies, such as Biological Corridors, where she has developed connectivity consolidation strategies in the San Juan - La Selva Biological Corridor, Costa Rica.



Administrative Assistant

Kattia Méndez

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Ms. Méndez should be contacted for all logistical issues and questions during your stay in Costa Rica. Call Kattia at +011 (506) 2524-0607.

Overview of the Program

Sites to Be Visited

We will visit a large diversity of forests and ecosystems, ranging from classic lowland tropical rain forest to endangered tropical dry forests to chilly montane oak forests and paramo. Most of our time will be spent at the three field stations owned and operated by OTS: Las Cruces, Palo Verde, and La Selva. Due to the number of rooms available to the course at each location, it may not always be possible to house all males and females in separate quarters. Accommodations range from large rooms of bunk beds at some sites to smaller rooms for four to six people at others. Sites are subject to change.

La Selva Biological Station

Located in the Caribbean lowlands, La Selva is OTS' largest field station and is one of the best-known tropical research sites in the world. The station protects approximately 1,600 hectares of primary and secondary tropical rain forest. It averages 4,000 millimeters (over 13 feet) of rainfall a year. This lush environment facilitates the existence of thousands of species of plants and animals, making La Selva a great place to see all kinds of wildlife, including toucans, monkeys, ocelots, agoutis, peccaries, and the endangered green macaw. Two major rivers, the Sarapiquí and the Puerto Viejo, border La Selva. These rivers form part of the San Juan River Basin. La Selva is connected via a biological corridor with Braulio Carrillo National Park, which contains 46,000 hectares of forestland and ascends almost 3,000 meters in elevation to Volcán Barva, which overlooks the town of Heredia in the Central Valley. La Selva has an extensive trail system, lots of lab space, and is, in general, a pretty busy place. (The station can sleep over 100 people.) Important crops grown in the area surrounding La Selva include banana and heart of palm. Services available at La Selva include laundry and internet access. Telephone and fax are available in special circumstances. Showers may or may not have hot water. Housing consists of small dorm rooms with up to six students each.



Las Cruces Biological Station



Las Cruces Biological Station is located on the south Pacific slope of Costa Rica close to the town of San Vito, only a few kilometers from the Panamanian border. At 1,100 meters, Las Cruces is the site of the world famous Wilson Botanical Garden, which houses 10 hectares of native and imported tropical plants, including bromeliads, palms, heliconias, and orchids. In 1983, UNESCO recognized Las Cruces as part of the international Amistad Biosphere Reserve. The site also protects 365 hectares of forest, with a rich diversity of plants, mammals, birds, and other important groups. Close to the station, you will find a collection of forest patches that have been an important site for research on the biological dynamics of fragments. This is a very important site for research in restoration ecology. Las Cruces is one of our most comfortable

field sites. Available services include internet access, laundry, and hot water.

Palo Verde Biological Station



Through an agreement with the Costa Rica National Park Service, OTS maintains a field station within the Palo Verde National Park. This reserve, located in the northwestern region of the country, lies on the boundary between an extensive marsh and seasonally dry forest underlain with limestone. It protects part of the lower Tempisque River Basin, the largest river drainage of the historic province of Guanacaste. Palo Verde is recognized internationally as one of the most important wetland habitats for nesting waterfowl. It is also a great place to see monkeys,

deer, lizards, and crocodiles. Several trails lead to lookout points with incredible scenic vistas, favorite spots for watching the sunset. It is also unique among Costa Rican parks in that domestic cattle have been incorporated into its management program; a somewhat controversial decision that we will have a closer look at when we are there. The field station is rustic and is the smallest of OTS' research stations. Services available at Palo Verde include internet access and laundry. Palo Verde is the buggiest of our sites, particularly in the wet season (May-November), so be prepared for lots of mosquitoes while we are there!

San Pedro, San José

San Pedro is located close to San José, the capital city of Costa Rica. San Pedro is a densely populated, urban center. It is also the location of the University of Costa Rica, which houses OTS' Costa Rican offices. As a university town, San Pedro provides many resources for undergraduate students, including restaurants, libraries, and bookstores. San Pedro will be your home during three weeks of Spanish at the Costa Rican Language Academy (CRLA). CRLA houses students with Costa Ricans (one student per family). In many cases, students quickly become part of the warm and vibrant social life that characterizes the Costa Rican family. During the week, while classes are in session, student activities revolve around San Pedro. On weekends, however, students are free to travel and may take advantage of hiking and camping opportunities in the surrounding hills or may venture further from the Central Valley to enjoy the nearby beaches of Jaco and Manuel Antonio. Services available at your homestay in San Pedro include telephone, laundry, and hot water. E-mail is most readily accessible at the language institute or at the OTS offices.



Masaya, Nicaragua



Shortly after midterm break, we will take a trip to Nicaragua where we will have the opportunity to witness the rich culture of this neighboring Central American country. During our visit, we will participate in a community outreach project. And, our experience will be enriched with cultural activities in Masaya.

Academic and Student Life on the Program

It is important to recognize that the OTS program differs from your typical on-campus life in at least four very important ways.

First, of course, you will be living in a foreign country. You will be a guest in Costa Rica, and consequently you will need to be sensitive to and respectful of Costa Rican customs and culture. In general, Costa Ricans (“Ticos” and “Ticas”) are warm, friendly, and courteous. We encourage you to interact with many Ticos, and we hope you will develop some good friendships. It is important to remember that certain behaviors that are acceptable among fellow classmates at an OTS site may not be acceptable when dealing with non-course participants. For example, Costa Ricans tend to be conservative in their attitudes toward nudity and sex. Thus, state of undress that is acceptable and inevitable in field station dormitories might be offensive in public. Also, nudity on beaches, no matter how apparently deserted, could seriously jeopardize future program use of

non-OTS sites. Costa Ricans tend to be much more tolerant of noise (say, the loud music coming from the neighbor's house, or the children shouting and running in the living room) than many of us are in the U.S. While we ask that you be respectful of Costa Rican ways and customs, we also understand that cultural norms can often be subtle, complex, and even counter-intuitive. Please feel free to ask OTS staff about any questions you have regarding cultural differences and norms at any time.

Second, you will spend far more time in course-related activities this semester than you do on campus. Our program is **labor intensive**. Though we do give campus-like instruction (assigned readings, lectures, discussion groups, etc.), we also take orientation walks to learn about each environment we visit, including important plants and animals, perform field projects and/or labs, and take field trips to local sites of interest such as plantations, clinics, etc. During the field sections of the program, your typical daily schedule may look like this:

- 6:30am Breakfast. Rice and beans are a staple diet for Costa Ricans, and this is true even at breakfast. Most mornings will begin with *gallo pinto*, or rice and beans cooked together with onions, garlic, and other spices. This will often be accompanied by eggs, toast, fruit and coffee, juice or tea.
- 7:30am Field activity. Most field activities take all morning, or in some cases will go into the afternoon. If we plan to be out in the field until, for instance, 2pm or 3pm, we will pack a box lunch (usually a sandwich of your choice, fruit, cookies, and juice; and yes—bean sandwiches are an option). For field activities, you will often need to wear rubber boots, and always take water and your field notebook with you. This is the best part of the day—be prepared to get wet and muddy!!
- 12:00pm Lunch back at the station. Whatever we have for lunch, it will almost certainly be accompanied by rice and beans.
- 1:00pm Rest/shower time.
- 2:00pm Lectures and/or discussion sections.
- 5:00pm Free time. Most students use this space to go running, play soccer, rest, etc.
- 6:00pm Dinner. (You guessed it, among other offerings, rice and beans!)
- 7:00pm Some days, we will have Spanish activities or evening lectures. Otherwise this time can be used for study time or relaxing.

As you can see, most days are pretty well packed with course-related work. The good news is that we are aware of the need for down time and arrange the program to include one free day approximately every 7 days while we are in the field. Also, of course, much of your work is done in beautiful natural settings. The experience of actually working in a lush tropical forest is incomparable to the experience of simply reading about the rain forest in a campus library. Because the program is so time-intensive, students in previous semesters have found that there is little opportunity for individual travel while the course is in session. This is, of course, compensated by the fact that we visit a large variety of sites with the group during the program. However, if you want to explore Costa Rica some more on your own, you should plan on taking full advantage of the one-week semester break, or plan to arrive early or stay later.

Third, you will have limited personal space this semester. Though you may have one or two

roommates on campus, in Costa Rica you will be living closely with 12-25 other students and two to five professors or field assistants. This means communication and respect will be crucial. All of us need to be as open, honest, and cooperative as possible. We also need to have sincere respect for one another, regardless of different opinions and lifestyles. This includes respect for privacy, respect for rules and regulations, and even respect for the fact that unpredictability is an inherent feature of field-based programs such as ours. Indeed, next to communication and cooperation, flexibility and a good sense of humor are the most important characteristics of a successful student in our program. By living and working with the same people for 15 weeks, you will undoubtedly develop a number of very close friendships. The combination of uncomfortable (being wet, muddy, and tired) and wonderful (watching iguanas sunning on the bridge at La Selva) situations creates great images and memories. You will, for sure, share these with your fellow participants well beyond the end of the semester.

Fourth, you will be expected to take a more active role in your own learning process. As OTS students, you must not only be proactive in asking the questions (and finding the answers) that are important to you; you must also be ready to share your own knowledge and experience with the rest of the group. Each one of you was asked to participate in the OTS Undergraduate Semester Abroad Program because we believe you have a unique background and special enthusiasm that will not only allow you to get the most from the program but will also greatly enrich the experience for your classmates and professors. So do not be afraid to give everything you have to these 15 weeks.

Family Visits

In general, visits from friends and family will not be possible while classes are in session. If your family or friends would like to visit you in Costa Rica, please coordinate with them so that the dates of their visit coincide with mid-term break. Alternatively, friends and family may visit either *before* or *after* the program. If visits are scheduled for after the program end date, you may have to renew your tourist visa by leaving the country for 72 hours. See the section on passport and visas in Logistics. If you have any questions about coordinating visits from friends and family, please contact Kattia Mendez (kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org).

Mid-Semester Break

During mid-semester break, you are free to travel/stay where you wish, but note that *expenses incurred during this vacation period are your personal responsibility and are not included in the programmatic costs to OTS.* In other words, during mid-term break you must pick up the tab for all of your travel, food, lodging, etc. The good news is that transportation by bus is inexpensive, and reasonable accommodations and food can be found for pretty low prices.

Logistics

Passport and Visa Information

If you have not already obtained your passport, you should do so immediately! If you have not provided this information to the Costa Rican Office on your registration form, please e-mail or

call Kattia Mendez (kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org) with the information. *If you are NOT a citizen of a North American or European country, you will probably need a special visa to get into Costa Rica. Contact the OTS Costa Rica Office IMMEDIATELY to begin the necessary steps.* If you plan to travel elsewhere in Latin America after the semester, you may find it cheaper to schedule a plane ticket with San José as a stopover. Remember to check about visa requirements for any other country that you plan to visit.

If you are a U.S. citizen, upon arrival in Costa Rica you will automatically be granted a tourist visa for 90 days. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please contact OTS immediately to determine your visa requirements. OTS will assist you with paperwork for all necessary visas. When we leave the country to visit Nicaragua in the middle of the course, your tourist visa will be automatically renewed for another 90 days, and it should not be necessary for you to request an extension. Contact OTS if you have questions or would like more information about this.

Please consider that if you enter Costa Rica from a yellow fever endemic country, you *must* provide proof of vaccination when you enter the country.

Airline Reservations

You must arrange for travel to and from Costa Rica on your own; the group will not meet in the U.S. prior to departure. You will need to purchase a round trip ticket. Please know if you do not do so you will not be allowed to enter the country. We will first meet in San José, where an OTS staff member will be waiting for you at the airport. **Please wear your OTS T-shirt so staff at the airport can easily identify you.** Plan to arrive at Juan Santamaria International Airport in San José by Monday evening, at the latest. The last day of the program is the earliest departure date for all students. Please note that you may need to pay a \$29 departure tax at Juan Santamaria International Airport when you leave Costa Rica. Some of the flight tickets already include this tax; please confirm this information with your airline. *OTS will not be responsible for your travel or stay before or after arrival and departure dates.*

Money

In addition to airport and exit taxes, plan to have enough money for personal expenses. You will be required to pay for health care, personal effects, mail, sodas, snacks, and souvenirs. Imported items such as batteries (e.g., for flashlights), shampoo, sunscreen, etc., are expensive in Costa Rica, so you may want to bring them with you. To give you an idea, a 10 oz (300 mL) bottle of Herbal Essences shampoo may cost around 3000 colones (\$5-6). It is hard to set a standard for a semester budget for personal expenses, but unless you plan to do additional traveling during or after the program or buy lots of souvenirs, \$600–\$750 for personal expenses should be adequate. The unit of currency in Costa Rica is the colón (plural: colones), and as of this writing (November 2016), the exchange rate is about 558 colones to the dollar.

There are various options for accessing money in Costa Rica. Generally, debit cards and ATM cards are the most convenient for obtaining cash. The most widely available ATM machines are Cirrus and Plus systems. Most of these will issue money only in colones, but some will also issue dollars. Cash advances on credit cards can also be obtained in banks, though a service charge may be imposed. In larger cities and businesses, credit cards can be used almost everywhere. However, a foreign transaction fee may apply. Check with your bank or credit card company for

more information. You might consider to have at least some cash available (\$50–\$100) for immediate exchange upon arrival, but dollars also are accepted almost everywhere in Costa Rica.

Students will be required to provide an equipment deposit of \$50 at the beginning of the program, to be returned in full if all of the course equipment is returned without damage at the end of the semester (normal wear and tear not included).

Laptop Computers

Our program will use PC based laptop computers, and some will be available for student use. However, there is limited availability of laptops for student use, so we strongly suggest you bring your own. Students who have brought their own computers in the past have generally appreciated having them on hand, especially during crunch times when *everyone* has a paper due at 5pm.

If you bring your own laptop (Mac or PC is fine), **make sure you have Microsoft Word and Excel programs**. Internet is generally available at all OTS stations and at the Spanish language academy.

Consider bringing an extra plastic bag and silica gel to protect your laptop and computer accessories from humidity. While in Costa Rica, make sure you do not store your computer in humid places (for example, under the bed!). Do not leave your computer out in the open and unattended in public places. *OTS will assume no responsibility in case of loss or theft*. We strongly recommend that you insure your computer before bringing it to Costa Rica. Consider bringing a lock that allows you to secure your computer to the table where you are working.

Health Care

Medical Services

If you do not already have health insurance, you need to arrange immediately for international coverage during the semester. *Make sure that your health policy covers medical expenses while you are overseas*. If your health policy is based on reimbursement after medical treatment, you *must* bring a credit card with you to use in the event of an emergency. Please note that ***you will be responsible for all of your medical expenses***. Contact the OTS offices if you have questions or need any assistance in finding a policy (undergraduate@tropicalstudies.org).

Before coming to Costa Rica, make sure you are up-to-date on all of your regular immunizations. In addition, you may wish to get additional immunizations for diseases particular to the tropics. Check with professional travel health consultants at your college or university for current recommendations.

The OTS program travels with an extensive first-aid kit. However, you must bring adequate supplies of any prescription drugs that you need. If your doctor advises against taking a large supply of medication with you, he/she should provide a written diagnosis and the suggested prescription to facilitate proper treatment by a Costa Rican physician. In addition, bring supplies of pain relievers or medication that you normally use if you are prone to headaches, ear aches, allergies, cramps, intestinal disorders, yeast infections, etc. Antifungal/athlete's foot cream and hydrocortisone cream (for itchy bug bites) are recommended. Although most drugs are available in Costa Rica, do not count on finding your usual name brand. Traveler's diarrhea is a very

common ailment. If you are susceptible to changes in “gut flora,” you should bring something to combat diarrhea or relieve discomfort (e.g., Pepto Bismol, Imodium). In addition, Costa Rica has lots of curvy, mountainous roads. If you are susceptible to motion sickness you should bring appropriate medication, such as Dramamine.

In the event of a serious illness or injury, good medical care is readily available in Costa Rica. All of the OTS field stations have clinics nearby for immediate medical attention. Students requiring medical attention while in San José generally go to the Clínica Bíblica, considered the best medical center in the country. If you have any medical problems or questions about medical care in Costa Rica, please talk to a member of the OTS staff.

Counseling Services

Being in a new country on a new program inevitably exposes a student to unexpected stress that can detract from the overall experience. In Costa Rica, many types of support are available for dealing with stress and emotional issues within the context of study abroad. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the different options, please talk to a member of the OTS staff (Kattia Mendez kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org or Adriana Baltodano adriana.baltodano@tropicalstudies.org).

Please be aware that, in general, professional counseling services are available on a very limited basis while the program is in session. Because the program spends most of its time in the field, attending counseling sessions may involve two-to-three day absences from the program at a time, as most counselors have their offices located in San José. Given the intensity of the program, this can be an important obstacle for many students.

If you receive counseling services while in Costa Rica, you will be responsible for all associated expenses, including transportation, lodging (where applicable), and professional fees. If you have any history of mental health issues or believe you may need counseling support while the program is in session, OTS strongly recommends that you consult with a mental health professional to assess your counseling needs *before* coming to Costa Rica. It is also important that you contact the undergraduate program coordinator (adriana.baltodano@tropicalstudies.org) to determine whether the semester schedule, location of field sites and your counseling needs are compatible or present logistical difficulties.

Immunizations

At least four to six weeks before coming to Costa Rica, you must check with your personal physician, Student Health Service, or a travel health consultant, for professional advice regarding immunizations. In addition, you should check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.html> for the latest updates on disease and vaccinations in Costa Rica and Central America. The following information may help orient you to some of the immunizations you might consider. *This is only an abbreviated list and cannot substitute for direct consultation with a qualified travel health physician.*

Booster Shots. Make sure you are up-to-date on all of your regular immunizations, including the following:

Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis

Adequate primary series plus booster within the last 10 years (Tdap or Td). Those who have not received a previous dose of an acellular pertussis-containing vaccine in adulthood should receive a one-time dose of Tdap vaccine.

Measles Make sure you are up to date on your measles vaccine.

Hepatitis B Since you might be exposed to blood (for example, in medical care facilities).

Additional Vaccines. Other vaccines recommended for Costa Rica are as follows:

Typhoid Two typhoid vaccines are available:

1) Inactivated Typhoid Vaccine (Shot):

One dose provides protection. It should be given at least 2 weeks before travel to allow the vaccine time to work. A booster dose is needed every 2 years for people who remain at risk.

2) Live Typhoid Vaccine (Oral): Four doses, given 2 days apart, are needed for protection. The last dose should be given at least 1 week before travel to allow the vaccine time to work. A booster dose is needed every 5 years for people who remain at risk.

Hepatitis A For travelers, the vaccine series should be started at least one month before traveling to provide the best protection. Two doses of the vaccine are needed for lasting protection. These doses should be given at least 6 months apart.

Influenza Flu (including 2009 H1N1) is transmitted throughout the year in the tropics, and all travelers are at increased risk.

Suggested Additional Vaccines. The following vaccines are recommended under certain circumstances:

Rabies There have been only 3 confirmed cases of rabies in Costa Rica since 1970 (WHO statistics): one from a dog bite and 2 caused by cats. However, **it is OTS policy that students who wish to handle bats must be vaccinated against rabies and provide proof of the pre-rabies vaccination series** (one of our projects this years may be on bats). Keep in mind that vaccination does not guarantee that you will be handling bats. Also, a pre-rabies vaccination series does not eliminate the need for post-exposure treatment. It is important to avoid exposure to vampire bats by sleeping indoors or in a tent at night. In the unlikely case that students are bitten by bats, they must undergo the post-rabies exposure vaccine series.

Other diseases of concern:

Malaria You may consider taking antimalarial medication if you plan to travel to Limon province in Costa Rica and/or Nicaragua. There are several different malarial prophylactics available. Consult with your physician about the appropriate prescription for the areas you plan to visit.

Dengue This unpleasant, flu-like disease has recently increased in Costa Rica, with localized, repeated outbreaks during the last several years. In 2005 and again in 2013, the incidence of dengue rose dramatically with respect to previous years. Mosquitoes carry the dengue virus, and no vaccine for the disease exists. Prevention consists of using insect repellent, wearing protective clothing, and avoiding being outside at dawn and dusk in risk-prone areas. Treatment consists of resting, drinking fluids, and taking acetaminophen (not aspirin). Dengue is usually not very serious in otherwise strong, healthy people but a rare hemorrhagic form that can develop upon second infection does require medical attention. Consult your doctor for more information.

Chikungunya Chikungunya is a viral disease transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes. It causes fever and severe joint pain. Other symptoms include muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue and rash. The disease shares some clinical signs with dengue, and can be misdiagnosed in areas where dengue is common. There is no cure for it, and treatment is focused on relieving the symptoms. For protection during outbreaks of chikungunya, clothing which minimizes skin exposure to the day-biting vectors is advised. Repellents can be applied to exposed skin or to clothing in strict accordance with product label instructions. Repellents should contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide), IR3535 (3-[N-acetyl-N-butyl]-aminopropionic acid ethyl ester) or icaridin (1-piperidinecarboxylic acid, 2-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-methylpropylester). For those who sleep during the daytime, insecticide-treated mosquito nets afford good protection.

Zika Zika virus infection is caused by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, usually causing mild fever, rash, conjunctivitis, muscle or joint pain, and general malaise that begins 2-7 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. One out of four infected people develops symptoms of the disease. Among those who do, the disease is usually mild and can last 2-7 days. Symptoms are similar to those of dengue or chikungunya, which are transmitted by the same type of mosquito. Neurological and autoimmune complications are infrequent, but have been described in the outbreaks in Polynesia and, more recently, in Brazil. Zika virus is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, which is the same mosquito that transmits dengue and chikungunya. Treatment consists of relieving pain, fever, and any other symptom that inconveniences the patient. To prevent dehydration, it is recommended to control the fever, rest, and drink plenty of water. There is no vaccine or specific drug for this virus.

Traveler's diarrhea

This can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites that are found throughout the region and can contaminate food or water. Infections may cause diarrhea and vomiting. The most common form of traveler's diarrhea is caused by strains of *E. coli*. There is no vaccine, and treatment generally consists of resting and drinking fluids, although your doctor may choose to prescribe antibiotics).

Yellow fever Yellow fever is currently not present in Costa Rica, but check with your local health department. *If you enter Costa Rica from a yellow fever endemic country, you will need to provide proof of vaccination when you enter the country.*

Cholera Several years ago there was a small outbreak of cholera in Costa Rica. In general, be careful of what and where you eat when you are on your own in Costa Rica. Specifically, avoid unwashed vegetables and fruits from street vendors. Food and water at all of the stations we visit is clean and safe.

Communication

Important Names and Numbers

The Organization for Tropical Studies has two primary administrative centers as it relates to this program:

OTS North American Office (NAO) Durham, N.C.	OTS Costa Rican Office (CRO) University of Costa Rica, San Pedro, Costa Rica
Organization for Tropical Studies Box 90630 Durham, NC 27708-0630 USA Tel. (919) 684-5155 Fax (919) 684-5661 undergraduate@tropicalstudies.org	Organización para Estudios Tropicales Apartado 676-2050 San Pedro, San José 2050 COSTA RICA Tel. 011 (506) 2524-0607 Fax. 011 (506) 2524-0608 kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org

OTS also operates three field stations in Costa Rica: Las Cruces, Palo Verde, and La Selva. We will be visiting all of them; as well as sites not administered by OTS. Both your incoming and outgoing mail will pass through the OTS Costa Rican Office. Find information about communication services at other sites to be visited in the section titled “Description of Sites to Be Visited” in this packet or contact OTS Undergraduate Program staff.

Phone and fax numbers for OTS Field Stations:

Field Station	Phone	Fax
Las Cruces	011 (506) 2773-4004	011 (506) 2773-3665
Palo Verde	011 (506) 2661-4717	011 (506) 2661-4712
La Selva	011 (506) 2766-6565	011 (506) 2766-6535

People answering OTS numbers during office hours are usually bilingual. After office hours, phones may be answered by Spanish speakers only.

Telephone

Communication with the United States from Costa Rica will be greatly simplified if you rely on a smartphone application or computer calling program such as Whatsapp and Skype respectively. Skype charges 2 cents a minute to call to US phone numbers and is free for calls between computers. You could also bring with you a telephone credit card with an access number for Costa Rica (such as those sold by AT&T). International prepaid phone cards are also available in Costa Rica, but usually are good for only 10 minutes. You can call home collect, but this is expensive and may not be possible from all phones.

If you arrive to Costa Rica with an unlocked cell phone, you can purchase a prepaid SIM chip for your cell phone (from the national company “Kolbi” at the airport or countless locations around the country, or from Claro or Movistar), which can be used at a very affordable rate for calls in-country. You might consider purchasing a prepaid chip for your safety and convenience while you are in the country but are not traveling with the group, such as on free days, during your Spanish homestay or during your midterm break.

To facilitate communication during the program, we also recommend that you download the Whatsapp application onto your smartphone BEFORE leaving the U.S.

Landline phone access varies from site to site. Palo Verde, Las Cruces, and La Selva have a shared phone from which students can make calls. Incoming calls can be received during mealtimes or at prescheduled times at these stations.

E-mail and Internet

Students will take three weeks of Spanish classes at Costa Rican Language Academy (CRLA) in San Pedro, near San José. CRLA offers Internet access for a small fee. In addition, there are several Internet cafés located throughout San Pedro. At Palo Verde, Las Cruces, and La Selva you will have access to the Internet free of charge, but you should anticipate that you will not be able to check your e-mail daily. Tell your friends and family that they should not be surprised if you do not respond to their messages right away!

Letters and Packages

You can send or receive mail two main ways: via the Costa Rican mail system or via a postal service called Interlink. Packages or boxes mailed to you must be sent through Interlink. Be aware, however, that *OTS strongly discourages mailing or receiving packages*. Packages are subject to heavy import taxes. Chocolate, candy, clothes new or used, stuffed animals, etc. are all considered taxable items. *Even small packages will cost you \$2 to \$50 to receive. In addition, all packages sent to the country must pass through customs, where they will often be held for several weeks or months.*

You must pay for the mail you send. Note that Interlink is more costly than the Costa Rican postal system. On first-class letters (40 cents), Interlink will charge you 40 cents (so, both the sender and you pay 40 cents). OTS staff will keep track of your postal service expenses and charge you at the end of the semester.

If all this seems complicated, do not worry! We will re-visit this topic when you arrive here.

For purposes of receiving mail, your addresses here in Costa Rica are:

<i>For Costa Rican Postal System:</i>	<i>For Interlink Postal Service:</i>
<i>Your name</i>	<i>Your name</i>
Organización para Estudios Tropicales	Organization for Tropical Studies
Undergraduate Program	Undergraduate Program
Apartado 676-2050	CRC341
San Pedro 2050	7801 NW 37th Street
Costa Rica	Doral , FL 33195-6503

Risk Management in Costa Rica

Whenever you travel in a foreign country, you are bound to encounter certain risks. In order to have an enjoyable and productive travel experience, it is important to continually take precautions to minimize risks to you and your friends. Although Costa Rica has a well-deserved reputation for being a secure place for foreign travelers, safety issues are just as relevant here as they are anywhere else in the world. We urge you to review this document carefully and to follow the suggestions to minimize risks to you and your possessions. Please note that this document focuses on risks from people. Information on other risks in natural areas will be addressed in detail at each station we visit. If you have any questions at any time about risk and risk management in Costa Rica, please do not hesitate to talk with a member of the OTS staff and faculty.

In San Pedro, while you are studying Spanish, you will stay with host families, who will take a personal and direct interest in ensuring your safety in the Central Valley. And of course, OTS staff can be contacted 24 hours a day.

Managing Risk of Crime and Theft

Pickpockets and petty theft are as common in Costa Rica as they are anywhere in the world. Your style of dress and hair/eye color will likely mark you as foreigners, and foreigners are often the targets of theft because it is assumed that they carry more valuables with them. In the past, OTS students have lost money, passports, backpacks, and other possessions of both monetary and sentimental value because of pickpockets, break-ins, unregistered taxis, and street robbers. Historically, the incidence of violent crime in Costa Rica has been low, but unfortunately it has begun to rise in recent years.

Here are some suggestions for reducing risk to yourself and your property:

- Carry a photocopy of your passport. (Do not carry the original unless absolutely necessary.)
- Change money only in banks or at your hotel. Do not change money in the streets.
- Do not carry more cash on you than necessary. Do not display large amounts of cash in public.
- Keep a close watch (and—even better—a tight hold) on your belongings at all times in public areas. Use pocketbooks with a secure closure, and do not carry your wallet in a

- rear trouser pocket. Put a lock on your backpack zippers, or carry your backpack in front of you when you walk. Never entrust your belongings to a stranger, even for a moment.
- Be alert to possible staged distractions by pickpockets.
 - Always travel in a group, even if you are just going out for the evening. If you decide to stay out late, do *not* stay out alone.
 - Always take *registered* taxis, especially after dark. Registered taxis are red with yellow triangles on the doors, and all have working meters (*marías*) and a two-way radio. Do not be too trusting of your taxi drivers. Always note the number and license plate of the taxi, in case a problem should come up.
 - Do not engage in reckless or risky behavior (e.g., getting drunk, getting a ride home from strangers, swimming while under the influence of alcohol, using illegal drugs, etc.)
 - Carry the phone numbers of OTS staff wherever you go. Memorize at least two to three of these numbers.
 - Always inform your host family or OTS staff where you will be during free time, rest days, and mid-term break. If you change your plans while traveling, inform Kattia Méndez at the OTS office during office hours at tel +011 (506) 2524-0607, ext. 1521.
 - Inform OTS staff immediately of any situation or person that causes you to feel in any way uncomfortable.

Please remember *you are just as much at risk in rural areas as in urban areas*. In the United States, we are accustomed to associating crime with urbanization; but in Costa Rica, many rural towns, particularly along the coast, are also targets for petty and violent crime. This is especially true in tourist hubs, where thieves and pickpockets will target foreigners for a quick buck.

For your safety, also note that

- Pedestrians do NOT have the right of way in Costa Rica. Always check carefully both ways before crossing. Cars will NOT slow down for you!

Managing Risk in the Field

As part of the regular semester program, you will receive a risk-management orientation to each field site we visit, including an overview of the inherent risks of each site and the procedures to manage those risks. At each field site, you will meet and learn the names of two to three key people who are in the support staff, such as the station manager, director, office manager, resident biologist, guards, etc, within the first day or so. In case of any emergency, these people are available to help you, along with OTS staff. Teaching staff will always be housed within walking distance of the student housing. Make sure you know where the teaching staff is staying, so you can find them in the event of an emergency.

In general, please follow the guidelines below at all of our field stations, as well as in places that you may visit during free days:

- To reduce the risk of venomous snakebite, **always wear rubber boots in the forest**. In addition, always wear rubber boots and carry a flashlight with you after dark.
- **Do not**, under any circumstances, catch any snakes of any kind. Do not handle any animals that are potentially dangerous or venomous.
- Do not handle any animals, no matter how apparently docile, without the supervision of an OTS staff member.

- To reduce risk of bites from vampire bats, do not sleep outdoors unless you are in a tent. Students who are bitten by bats must undergo the post-rabies exposure vaccine series. This series can be difficult to locate in Costa Rica, so students may have to return to the United States to receive it.
- Always pack water, a bit of food, and a flashlight with extra batteries when you go for a hike, even if you plan to come back early.
- Always inform the on-site teaching staff where you are going and when you plan to be back.
- Familiarize yourself with the trail system as well as trail markers that can help you orient yourself in the forest.
- Do not go into the forest alone. As a rule of thumb, the minimum group size for going into the forest is three. This way, if an accident happens, there will be one person to stay with the injured student and one person to run back to the station for help.
- If you get lost in the forest, stay where you are and wait. We will come find you.

Managing Health Risks

Physical Health and Well-being

In the event of illness or injury, please notify the OTS teaching staff. We are not medical technicians, but we can facilitate adequate medical attention for most issues that come up in the field. Good medical care is readily available in Costa Rica. All of the OTS field stations have clinics nearby for immediate medical attention, and excellent hospitals are available in larger towns and cities for situations requiring longer-term attention. Students requiring medical attention while in San José generally go to the Clínica Bíblica, considered the best medical center in the country.

While Costa Rica has excellent medical services, it is always best to take a few preventive measures to avoid getting sick in the first place. Some of these include:

- Drink lots of safe water to avoid dehydration and other medical problems. Water at all of our field sites is safe to drink.
- Use sunscreen. Even on a cloudy day, the tropical sun is very strong and will burn you.
- Use insect repellent, protective clothing, and mosquito nets to prevent insect-transmitted diseases such as dengue. In recent years, dengue fever has been on the rise in Costa Rica and chikungunya virus incidence is rising in Central America.
- Most beaches in Costa Rica have dangerous rip currents that have claimed the lives of students, tourists, and nationals. Before getting into the water at a beach, make sure the area is *not* prone to rip currents. Do not swim alone. Do not swim after dark or under the influence of alcohol.
- If you get caught in a rip current, do not panic. Please take a moment to watch these videos and be better prepared in case you face one:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fe26ZbFulno>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ie3v8G5Z5Qc>
- Inform a member of the OTS staff if you have diarrhea that is severe or that lasts for more than 48 hours.
- Inform a member of the OTS staff if you have a cut or wound that is not healing.
- Do not get drunk. Do not use illegal drugs.
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, are just as much a risk in Costa Rica as

they are in the United States. If you choose to engage in sexual relations, always use condoms. These are inexpensive and can be purchased at many stores and all pharmacies. If your partner does not like to use condoms, insist.

- Carry a credit card and your health insurance information with you for use in case of a medical emergency. Most hospitals require a credit card deposit as a guarantee for payment for emergency attention.

If you receive medical attention while in Costa Rica, you will be responsible for all associated expenses, including transportation, lodging (where applicable), and professional fees.

Emotional Health and Well-being

Issues in emotional health also come up during a study abroad experience. Being in a new country can push us outside of our comfort zone, resulting in emotions that run the full gamut from excitement and enthusiasm to loneliness and depression. In addition, the OTS Semester Abroad Program is intensive and requires students and professors to live in close quarters for extended periods of time. Given the logistical constraints of the program, it is impossible to meet the personal needs and living preferences of all of our students. This can lead to high levels of stress and make the program less enjoyable for some. If this happens to you, *please let us know!* We can help you identify and implement strategies to better manage the stress you are experiencing, or we can connect you to professionals who can support you in the personal aspects of your journey through Costa Rica. Please remember we are here to make your stay as enjoyable and productive as possible.

In Costa Rica, many types of professional support are available for dealing with stress and emotional issues within the context of study abroad. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the different options, please talk to a member of the OTS staff (undergraduate@tropicalstudies.org).

Please be aware that, in general, professional counseling services are available on a *very* limited basis while the program is in session. Because the program spends most of its time in the field, attending counseling sessions may involve two to three day absences from the program at a time, as most counselors have their offices located in San José.

If you receive counseling services while in Costa Rica, you will be responsible for all associated expenses, including transportation, lodging (where applicable), and professional fees.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs

Alcohol abuse (i.e., getting drunk) is strictly forbidden while the program is in session. Getting drunk in any context is risky, but in the study abroad context the risks are greatly magnified. Alcohol abuse not only puts you at personal risk, it can interfere with your academic performance, with the safety and well-being of other students, and with the safety and reputation of the program. OTS cannot and will not assume responsibility for students who engage in risky behavior. OTS staff will take jokes or comments alluding to alcohol abuse as an indication that you are drinking irresponsibly. First-time offenders will be placed on probation; and second-time offenders are subject to dismissal from the program.

Under no conditions should you consider even for a moment bringing marijuana or any other illegal drugs into Costa Rica or buying any in the country. If you make jokes or comments alluding to personal drug use, OTS staff will take this as an indication that you are using drugs. Use or possession of illegal drugs while the program is in session is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program. Costa Rican drug laws are severe, and an arrest would be a disaster for you and for OTS. By current Costa Rican law, accused drug offenders are held in jail with no hope of bail until their trial date. Do not let this happen to you! OTS will not provide any assistance if you are arrested.

Rest Days and Free Time

The Semester Program schedule is intense. For this reason, OTS schedules rest days and free time throughout the semester. Nonetheless, *you will have much LESS time for rest and relaxation than in a typical on-campus semester.* Unstructured time falls into three basic categories. First, while you are studying Spanish in San José, you will have free weekends. OTS strongly encourages you to take advantage of these weekends to spend time with your host family. However, you may also travel during this time. If you decide to travel on free weekends, *please* follow all the guidelines listed in this packet, and realize that you are traveling at your own risk.

While you are in the field, you will have an occasional rest day or free afternoon or evening. On average, one rest day every 7 or 8 days. Please keep in mind that both students *and* staff are entitled to take a break on scheduled rest days. In the past, students have used rest days to sleep, catch up on assignments, write letters, or go for hikes in small groups. Each rest day may have rules of conduct applied to it (for example, where you can go, when you must be back, etc.), and these rules will vary depending on the conditions of the site. Your Resident Professors will inform you of rest day rules in advance of scheduled rest days. If you have any questions about this, please ask!

During the one-week semester break, students are free to travel where they wish, at their own risk. However, we request that you consider traveling in groups. Again, *please* follow the risk-management guidelines that we give you, and be careful at all times! You must inform OTS where you will be and how to reach you during mid-term break.

Please be aware that free time, rest days, and mid-term break rarely coincide with state or religious holidays. If formal program activities are scheduled during a religious holiday that you would like to observe, or if you need to request permission to be absent from program activities for any other reason, please let us know in advance.

All visits from family and friends should be scheduled during mid-term break, or before or after the Semester Program. OTS cannot assume responsibility for family and friends that visit Costa Rica while the program is in session.

On days off, break, and while on homestays, students are expected to behave responsibly. Please be aware that, as OTS has no involvement in the decisions students make while on their own, we are not responsible for your actions.

Women Travelers

The most frequent complaint of young women travelers in Costa Rica has to do with *piropos*, or catcalls, from Costa Rican men in the streets. Historically, *piropos* were short, spontaneous poems directed by men at passing women. Nowadays, *piropos* are much simpler and generally harmless comments, ranging from a simple hiss to an “Hola, macha” to somewhat more elaborate declarations. Some men may also try out their English skills with an occasional, “Hey, baby, where you go? I luv you! Good-bye.” However, *piropos* can occasionally be vulgar and inappropriate, and sometimes with limited Spanish ability it is difficult to tell the difference. Moreover, since U.S. women are not accustomed to this type of attention and often find it offensive, *piropos* can make a woman traveler feel uncomfortable and at risk.

Many people, including Costa Rican women and men, view *piropos* as sexual harassment, and in some circles, people are looking for strategies to eliminate them. For others, *piropos* are part of the tradition and color of Latin American society and thought to encourage a “friendly” and lively atmosphere in the street. The debate between these two points of view is unlikely to be settled during your short semester abroad, so the best strategy we can offer with respect to *piropos* at this time is to ignore them.

More serious threats for women travelers do exist in Costa Rica. In recent years sexual assaults directed at U.S. women have occurred at beach resorts on both coasts and in San José. To minimize your risk as a woman, we advise that you travel in a group, preferably of mixed gender, and that you do not go out alone at night. It also is important to keep in mind that travelers have reported sexual assaults by taxi drivers. When using taxis, make sure they have working door handles, locks, and meters (called “*marías*”). *Do not ride in the front seat with the driver*, as such familiarity can be easily misinterpreted.

Please keep in mind that body language is, like spoken languages, different everywhere you go. Watch your behavior and apparel in public places. What may pass as non-significant in social situations in the US may have different connotations in Costa Rica.

If you at any time feel uncomfortable about a particular person or situation while in Costa Rica, please bring this to the immediate attention of a member of the OTS staff. Remember that we are here to help you make your stay in Costa Rica as enjoyable and educational as possible.

Sexual Harassment

As part of its commitment to maintaining a healthy and productive work environment, OTS has a strong institutional policy regarding sexual harassment. Both overt and subtle sexual harassment is prohibited at all OTS facilities and during all OTS-sponsored activities. In addition, **sexual relations between OTS staff and students are absolutely prohibited.** *If you have any questions or complaints or find yourself in need of any other assistance in this context during your stay in Costa Rica, you are strongly urged to contact an OTS staff member with whom you feel comfortable discussing your concerns.* OTS staff can inform you of your rights in the case of sexual harassment and will orient you to the procedures for filing a formal complaint, if necessary. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing these issues with your professors, we ask that you contact the Education Director, Dr. Pia Paaby, in the Costa Rican Office at pia.paaby@tropicalstudies.org, tel +011 (506) 2524-0607, ext 1500.

Racism and Racial Stereotypes

As in many countries, racism and racial stereotypes exist in Costa Rica. The good news is that power divisions between class, race, and gender are less pronounced in Costa Rica than in other Central American countries. Also, Costa Rica takes pride in being a strong advocate for human rights, and many sectors of Costa Rican society are working to eliminate traditions of racism and sexism. Nonetheless, you may confront issues of racism and racial stereotypes during your study abroad experience.

At OTS, we encourage you to be frank and open about your experiences with and perceptions of racism in Costa Rica. If you at any time feel uncomfortable about a particular person or situation while in Costa Rica, please bring this to the attention of a member of the OTS staff. Within OTS, harassment on the basis of race is strictly forbidden, and should you feel uncomfortable because of an OTS employee or student, please report your concerns to Education Director Dr. Pia Paaby pia.paaby@tropicalstudies.org, tel +011 (506) 2524-0607, ext 1500. Remember that we are deeply committed to making your stay as enjoyable and productive as possible.

U.S. Embassy Support

In addition to the support of OTS staff and faculty, please remember that U.S. citizens traveling in Costa Rica can also find support and assistance on safety issues with the U.S. Embassy, located in Pavas just outside of San José. OTS routinely registers its students at the U.S. Embassy. Important phone numbers at the Embassy include:

- American Citizen Services and U.S. Consul General +011 (506) 2519-2000
- 24 hour Emergency +011 (506) 2220-3127

The U.S. State Department produces regular, updated information sheets on travel and safety in countries all over the world. This information is available on the Internet, and OTS strongly recommends you review the following sites pertinent to travel in Costa Rica:

- http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1093.html
- http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/benefits/benefits_1242.html
- <http://usembassy.or.cr/crinfo.html>

In addition, if you plan to travel to other Central American countries, we strongly recommend you review the consular information sheet for that country. All consular information sheets are available at the web site <http://travel.state.gov>

What to Bring

This section includes two checklists to help you pack for your trip:

- Clothing and Personal Items
- Field Equipment

As a general rule, *travel as light as possible*. It is hard to predict the optimal numbers and kinds of bags you should bring. It is definitely better to bring a few smaller bags (with multiple uses) than one large suitcase that is hard to haul around. A comfortable backpack for hiking is essential.

It would also be wise to include a daypack and perhaps some sort of nylon duffel bag. *Please expect any bag you bring into the field to get dirty and wet.*

For clothes, use lightweight fabrics such as cotton or wicking synthetics. Label all clothing with waterproof markers, sewn-in labels, or sewn-in distinctive insignia—we have communal laundry, and all socks tend to look alike. Except for your town clothes, most of your clothing will get muddy and receive rough treatment. Plan on keeping some clothes for relaxation, so you can change into something comfortable and dry when you come in from the field sweaty and muddy. Do not bring expensive watches or jewelry. OTS provides bed linens but you will need a towel at some sites.

Your own personal habits and research interests should be considered in deciding what to bring. Students from the previous semesters have complained about not having enough of the following: small field notebooks, batteries, ziplock bags, rain pants, aspirin, bandanas, vitamins, alarm clock, warm clothes, city clothes, and access to computers.

If you have any questions about what to bring, please contact us (kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org)!

Check List #1:

Clothing and Personal Items

Essential

- _____ Valid **Passport**.
- _____ **Money, ATM card, and/or credit card:** ATM machines are accessible near most sites. Traveler's checks are hard to change. It is a good idea to have at least a little cash on hand when you arrive.
- _____ **Backpack:** Bring a backpack that will hold your clothes, raingear, toiletries, books, boots, etc, enough for a 3-4 day trip.
- _____ **Shirts:** 3-5 "town" shirts, 1-2 "field" shirts, 3-5 t-shirts. Long-sleeved field shirts are good for bugs; roll them up when too hot. Lightweight cotton or wicking synthetic field shirts are best. You will appreciate having quick-drying clothes. Consider some shirts that are appropriate for "going out" in the city.
- _____ **Pants:** 2 pair of town pants, 1 pair of lounge/sweat pants, and 2-3 pairs of field pants. Although blue jeans are good for casual wear or the city, they do not make good field pants. Denim is hot, heavy, and very slow-drying. For the field, we recommend lightweight but sturdy pants. You will appreciate having quick-drying clothes and at least 2 pairs of field pants.
- _____ **Shorts:** 3-5 lightweight shorts, a mix of regular and athletic. Some students prefer "zip-off" field pants.
- _____ **Swimsuit:** 1-2 suits
- _____ **Underwear:** 10-13 pairs, cotton recommended
- _____ **Socks:** 7-10 pairs, some athletic and some knee-high for inside rubber boots to prevent blisters (such as thick soccer socks). Often get lost, so consider bringing extras or planning to purchase more in Costa Rica.
- _____ **Fleece jacket, sweater, sweatshirt, or a wool shirt:** If you tend to be cold, bring several so that you can "layer" rather than bringing something too heavy. At night, Las Cruces can be quite chilly (occasionally at 50-65 degrees at night with no heaters). *Do not forget to pack ENOUGH warm clothes!*
- _____ **Rainwear:** Bring a light breathable rain jacket (or poncho) and a small umbrella if you have one.
- _____ **Hiking boots:** Fancy leather hiking boots are *not* recommended. We suggest lightweight and fast drying hiking boots. Be aware that whatever boots you bring will take quite a beating. Best if they are waterproof.
- _____ **Sandals:** Keens, Tevas, or flip flops are great for lounging around the cabin area. Flip flops are also useful for wearing in public showers, to prevent fungal infections on the feet. *Please be aware that for your own safety you will not be allowed to wear this type of footwear either in the forest or while moving from building to building at any of the field sites.*

- _____ **Shoes:** Some students like to bring 1-2 nice pairs of sandals, sneakers, or otherwise comfortable shoes for going out dancing, walking around San Jose, or going running.
- _____ **Towel:** Towels are available at most sites, but you should bring a thin towel for the sites that do not provide them, and if you will visit the beach during your time away from the program.
- _____ **Medical supplies:** The program has a first-aid kit, but you should bring a personal supply of Advil/Tylenol, Neosporin-like cream, hydrocortisone cream, antifungal cream and/or powder, Dramamine, lots of Band-Aids, nail clippers, and vitamins if you use them, a four-month supply of ANY prescription medication you use (including contraceptives). Women who are prone to yeast or urinary tract infections should bring along medication.

Recommended

- _____ **Hat:** The sun is hot and bright when it is out. Could be a baseball hat, “adventure” hat, or anything that will keep the sun out of your eyes/ off your face.
- _____ **Umbrella:** Useful in San Jose and between buildings at the stations. Can be purchased in Costa Rica.
- _____ **Rubber boots:** Rubber boots are available cheaply in Costa Rica so you can purchase them after you arrive (although they may be less comfortable, depending on your feet). If you wear boots smaller than size 7 or larger than size 10 ½ or are prone to blisters or arch support issues, we recommend you bring nice shin-to-knee high rubber boots with you (check an outdoors store or online). Some previous students preferred to bring specialized snake boots or snake guards, but most said this was not necessary or convenient.
- _____ **SPF 30+ sunscreen:** Tropical sun is dangerously intense. Can purchase in Costa Rica, but it will be more expensive.
- _____ **Books:** Be prepared to swap with classmates. Could bring paperbacks or an e-reader. You will have lots of time to read.
- _____ **Toiletries:** Most items are available in Costa Rica, but if you are attached to a particular brand, you might want to bring a large supply as many imported products are quite expensive. Tampons can be purchased in-country, but women should bring a supply for emergencies.

Optional

- _____ **Eyeglasses or contact lenses:** Bring extra in case yours get lost, and bring a 4 months’ supply of solution for contacts. These are expensive and many types are unavailable in Costa Rica.
- _____ **Epipen:** If you are allergic to bee stings, bring an emergency adrenaline kit, such as an Anakit or Epipen, available by prescription. *Please inform OTS staff of your allergy.*

Check List #2:

Essential Field Equipment

Essential

- _____ **Flashlight and headlamp:** A good light is an absolute must. A headlamp can be better than a flashlight because your hands are free. In addition to a headlamp or strong and reliable handheld flashlight, bring a small backup flashlight to keep with you at all times. Previous students commented that it is a good idea to invest in a very good quality flashlight or headlamp (many lumens and good distance rating, brands such as Petzl or PrincetonTec).
- _____ **Keychain light:** can clip onto the keychain in your backpack as an additional backup
- _____ **Wristwatch:** This should be inexpensive and water-resistant
- _____ **Daypack:** (e.g., small backpack) for daily field use. Some come with a water bladder and hose, which can be useful if you will drink more water that way than with a water bottle.
- _____ **Lecture notebooks:** 2-4
- _____ **Field notebooks:** 1-3 pocket size. Rite-in-the-Rain books are popular, but any good sturdy field notebook will do.
- _____ **Pencils/pens:** Sharpie pens and mechanical pencils work best with Rite-in-the-Rain notebooks. Bring a few.
- _____ **Water bottle:** 1-2 water bottles about 1 liter size. Also consider a camelback in your daypack (to augment, but not replace, your water bottle). Make sure to clean your drinking bottle or bladder regularly with bleach or baking soda.

Recommended

- _____ **Laptop computer:** Generally all students bring their laptops to avoid competition for public computers when writing assignments are due. Read the section in this packet on caring for your laptop and be prepared to protect it from humidity.
- _____ **USB memory stick:** For storing and moving documents from computer to computer
- _____ **Insect repellent:** Chiggers can make your life miserable. Be sure your choice is effective against these. Natural or 5-30% DEET types are recommended. 100% DEET melts plastic and is unnecessary. Also consider extra anti-itch cream.
- _____ **Plastic folder:** To store handouts.
- _____ **Binoculars:** If you like birds, you will use these extensively.
- _____ **Spanish/English dictionary:** Some students have noted they generally use the internet for translations, but it can be good to have the book on hand when there is no internet.
- _____ **Batteries:** If you use rechargeable batteries, bring several sets, along with your own recharger. They are expensive and sometimes unavailable in Costa Rica.
- _____ **Camera:** SLR cameras will benefit from an extra lens cap and/or skylight filter as well as a waterproof case or other item to protect it from the rain and humidity. Past students have mentioned that a waterproof/shockproof camera is a plus.

- _____ **“Ziploc” plastic bags:** Useful for electronics and everything, really. Students have said that you will never regret bringing too many. Garbage bags could also be useful for your boots.
- _____ **Hand lens (10X):** The course has some on hand, but if you like plants or insects, you might find it useful to have your own available.

Optional (things some students have regretted bringing but others loved having)

- _____ **Sleeping bag:** Most students have said this was unnecessary and a waste of packing space because Las Alturas provides multiple blankets.
- _____ **Mosquito net:** The headgear type might be useful at Palo Verde. Some students were happy to have it and others found it to be overkill. Mosquito nets for beds are provided in sites where they are necessary.
- _____ **Private journal:** Since personal space is minimal during the program, you might consider bringing a journal notebook, in order to record and process important thoughts, feelings, and personal events during your experience. You will discover that your journal will provide an important personal outlet during the semester, as well as a great source of memories in the future!
- _____ **Musical instruments:** If you play guitar, mandolin, violin, flute, harmonica, or anything else that can be carried around easily, please bring it along!
- _____ **Field Guides:** The program library has a full range of Costa Rican Field Guides, but you may want to bring your own if you have a particularly strong interest in birds, plants, or other groups.
- _____ **Travel games:** Cards, bananagrams, apples-to-apples or similar games were recommended by past students.
- _____ **Soccer cleats:** In the past students without these have been at a great disadvantage in the exciting soccer games against station staff! You could bring cleats and/or running shoes too.

If you have trouble finding any of the above field equipment locally, try looking for them at the following companies or websites: amazon.com, bioquip.com, forestry-suppliers.com, rei.com, cabelas.com.

Your Arrival in Costa Rica

1. If possible, arrange a flight schedule that allows you at least two hours in the airport from which you will leave the States. You do not want to miss the international flight because of airline delays. *Send your participant registration form with your flight schedule to the OTS Office in Costa Rica as soon as it is available. We need this information so we can meet you at the airport in Costa Rica.*
2. Arrive at your local airport early to avoid being “bumped” because of overbooking. Reconfirm your international flight 72 hours in advance.
3. Label your baggage, inside and out, with the OTS Costa Rican Office (CRO) address and phone number (included in this orientation packet).
4. Be sure that your baggage claim tickets are correctly labeled as to destination (San José is SJO). You should put a TSA-approved lock on your luggage. Be sure to keep the keys to your luggage with you at all times.
5. *If your luggage is lost or delayed, report it before you leave the airport in Costa Rica, and give the name of the OTS offices in Costa Rica, tel. 2524-0607. Check your luggage upon arrival at the airport. We highly recommend that you secure your luggage with a small lock and that you carry all items of value (cameras, money, etc.) on the plane with you.*
6. Please carry the following phone numbers on you during your flight:
OTS Costa Rican Office: (506) 2524-0607 extensions 1520 or 1521.
Course mobile phone: (506) 8366-6124
Do not hesitate to call us if you have any problems or delays during your travels.
7. Carry on your passport, money, computer, toothbrush, and a change of clothes, just in case your luggage gets lost, delayed, or misdirected. Keep in mind that airline regulations regarding both checked and carry-on bags may change at any time. *Check your airline to confirm what items can be packed in your checked luggage, and what items can be carried on.* Do not pack sharp objects in your carry-on luggage. We suggest that you bring a 2-3 day supply of any essential medications on your carry-on bag as well.
8. Your appearance (e.g., dress and grooming) is important upon entry into Costa Rica. It will make dealing with Customs and Immigrations a lot smoother if you are clean and well-groomed.
9. Getting off the plane in Costa Rica. Here are the basic steps.
 - a. While in flight, fill out the customs declaration given to you by the airline host or hostess.
 - b. Upon deplaning, you will first go to *Migración*, where your passport will be checked and stamped.
 - c. Then you will retrieve your baggage at the carousel. (If your gear is bulky or heavy, grab a handcart for getting your stuff to the Customs area).
 - d. At the **Aduana** or Customs, an official will inform you what to do. Many times, all checked and carry-on bags will be x-rayed in Customs, but follow the instructions of the Customs officials. Costa Rican Customs officials tend to be polite and friendly, so if your bags get checked just be patient and honest about your travel plans.

- e. An OTS staff member will meet you on the sidewalk just outside of Customs. He/She will be holding an OTS sign that says “OTS Semester Abroad.” **Please wear your OTS T-shirt so staff at the airport can easily identify you.** *It is possible that you will have to wait a short time for this person. If this happens, do not go anywhere! Be patient and just wait.*
- f. Please watch your belongings closely when you exit Customs.

See you in Costa Rica!

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