

What to bring

In general, most items are available for purchase in Costa Rica, but we suggest you bring the following items to better enjoy your stay at OTS field stations. This list does not include potential research related materials, as those are project specific. It is a good idea to get in touch with the OTS station(s) where you will be working to arrange for any special materials you may need for your research to consult about their availability, purchase, or construction.

Check List #1: Clothing and Personal Items

This check list has been compiled to assist people who visit the tropics for the first time, and guide more seasoned travelers to what may or may not be available locally.

Essential

___ Valid passport

___ Money, ATM card, and/or credit card

It is a good idea to have at least a little cash (US dollars or Costa Rican colones) on hand when you arrive. ATM machines are accessible near most sites, including the luggage claim section of the San José airport. Most ATMs accept foreign cards and issue colones, while fewer give US dollars. Traveler's checks are hard to change.

___ 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

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. We do not recommend rain pants. Some researchers prefer "zipoff" field pants.

___ Shorts

___ Swimsuit

___ Underwear (cotton recommended)

___ Socks, including some knee-high for inside rubber boots to prevent blisters.

___ Fleece jacket, sweater, sweatshirt, or a wool shirt

Although you will be in the tropics, it can get cold...and the air conditioning in buildings can be frigid. If you plan to go to highland sites, low temperatures can even be near freezing in some places. Even in San Jose, it can get chilly at night and there are no heaters.

___ Rainwear

Bring a light breathable rain jacket (or poncho). Rain pants are not recommended.

___ Hiking boots

Fancy leather hiking boots are not recommended, because the soles can get caked with mud. Also, mud can clog breathable fabrics. We suggest lightweight and fast drying hiking boots. Rubber boots are best for field work.

_____ Sandals

Sport sandals or flip flops are great for lounging. Flip flops are also useful for wearing in public showers, to prevent fungal infections. 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 the field sites.

_____ Shoes

Some people like to bring 1-2 nice pairs of sandals, sneakers, or otherwise comfortable shoes for going out, walking around San Jose, or going running.

_____ Towel

It's good to bring a thin towel for traveling, as some economy hotels and hostels do not provide towels. OTS stations do provide towels.

_____ Medical supplies

OTS stations have a small sundry store stocked with very basic over-the-counter medicines such as Tylenol; however, they operate during business hours only.

Pharmacies are well stocked in Costa Rica, but note that many medications may require a Doctor's prescription (i.e. for antibiotics). So, we advise that you bring a personal supply of Advil/Tylenol, Neosporin-like cream, hydrocortisone cream, antifungal cream and/or powder, Dramamine, other first aid supplies, as well as enough of ANY prescription medication you use (including contraceptives).

_____ Insect repellent

Chiggers can make your life miserable. Be sure your insect repellent 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.

***At Palo Verde, insects can be quite persistent during certain times of year. If you plan to do research at Palo Verde, other insect repellent devices, clothing, etc. may be needed.

Recommended

_____ Hat

Could be a baseball hat, "adventure" hat, or anything that will provide shade from the strong sun, or keep your head covered in the forest if you prefer. We recommend wide-brimmed hats.

_____ Umbrella

_____ 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- or knee-high rubber boots (check an outdoors store or online). Some students prefer to bring specialized snake boots or snake guards, but this is a personal preference and most people wear rubber boots in the field.

- ___ SPF 15+ sunscreen
Tropical sun is dangerously intense. Although you can purchase sunscreen in Costa Rica, it will be more expensive.
- ___ Books, if you are a reader and think you will have time
- ___ 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. Tampons can be purchased in-country, but women should bring a supply for emergencies.

Optional

- ___ Eyeglasses or contact lenses
Bring extra solution for contacts as it is expensive and many types are unavailable in Costa Rica. Make sure to bring a copy of your prescription.
- ___ Anaphylaxis kit (i.e. Epipen)
If you are allergic to bee stings, bring an emergency anaphylaxis kit with epinephrine, such as an Anakit or Epipen, available by prescription. Please inform OTS staff of your allergy.
- ___ Pocket knife

Check List #2: Basic 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.
- ___ Keychain light (handy for attaching to your keys as a backup)
- ___ Wristwatch (inexpensive and water-resistant)
- ___ Daypack: (e.g., small backpack) for field use
Those that come with a water bladder and hose can be useful.
- ___ Field notebooks
Rite-in-the-Rain books are popular but expensive in Costa Rica and sold at limited locations.
- ___ Pencils/pens
Sharpie pens and mechanical pencils work best with Rite-in-the-Rain notebooks. Bring a few.
***Many people use technology for data collection instead of note books and pencils, but it will require a waterproof case.
- ___ Water bottle: 1-2 water bottles about 1-liter size

Recommended

- ___ Laptop computer (electric supply in Costa Rica is 110W)
- ___ USB memory stick
- ___ Binoculars

___ Spanish/English dictionary

___ Batteries

If you use rechargeable batteries, bring several sets, along with your own charger. 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. A waterproof/shockproof camera is a plus.

___ “Ziploc” plastic bags

Useful for electronics and everything, really. Garbage bags could also be useful for your boots. If you store binoculars or cameras inside zip-lock bags during the rain, do not close the bag tightly, for they will fog.

___ Hand lens (10X)

Optional (things some people regret bringing but others love having)

___ Sleeping bag: Not very useful unless you plan to go camping somewhere.

___ Mosquito net

The headgear type might be useful at Palo Verde. A travel bed net could be useful if you plan to travel to rustic places where these might not be provided.

___ Private journal

___ Musical instruments: musicians are always popular at the stations!

___ Field guides

___ Travel games

___ Soccer cleats