



Organization for Tropical Studies



Tropical Biology in Costa Rica *Undergraduate Summer Study Abroad Program* *Orientation Packet*

¡BIENVENIDOS!

Bienvenido al programa de pregrado del OET
*(OTS in Spanish is **Organización para Estudios Tropicales**)*

We are confident that this summer will be one of the most challenging and fulfilling experiences of your college career! You will work in some of the world's premier tropical research sites, see beautiful animals and plants, meet friendly people, work hard, learn a lot, and have fun besides! Our group will often consist between 20 - 12 students, 1 course coordinator, (possibly a co-course coordinator) and 1 teaching assistant. Numerous guests will also visit our course and deliver lectures and lead field exercises. In short, you will meet many interesting people, and we expect that, with sensitivity to others' attitudes and feelings, you will learn a tremendous amount and develop many strong and lasting bonds.

This Orientation Packet contains very important information to help you prepare for your summer in Costa Rica. Please read it carefully, follow the recommendations and suggestions we provide, and bring it with you to Costa Rica. If you have any questions, please let us know! Contact information for OTS Undergraduate Program staff and faculty is provided in this packet.

We are very much looking forward to having you in our program. ***¡HASTA PRONTO!***

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**OTS Education Staff for the Summer Program
Costa Rica Staff**

OTS Administrative Staff in Costa Rica:



Director of Academics in Costa Rica

Sofia Rodríguez Brenes, Ph.D.

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Sofía studied biology at the University of Costa Rica, and earned a doctorate in ecology, evolution and behavior at The University of Texas at Austin. At UT Austin, she studied the spread of a devastating fungal pathogen (better known as chytrid or Bd) in populations of the túngara frog in Panamá, and how infections with this pathogen affect the frog’s behaviors and reproductive success. Her continuing research interests are at the intersection of animal behavior, sexual selection, and disease ecology, especially changes in behavior caused by disease. Sofia is also passionate about teaching, especially in the field. Throughout her career she has taught at high school and university level, in Spanish and English, and with organizations from Costa Rica, Mexico, and the United States. At OTS she is in charge of all undergraduate Costa Rican education programs, and also coordinates the graduate courses Tropical Biology: an Ecological Approach and Ecología Tropical y Conservación.



Administrative Assistant

Kattia Méndez

kattia.mendez@tropicalstudies.org

Kattia should be contacted for logistical issues during your stay in Costa Rica or if you have detailed questions about visa requirements.

OTS Administrative Staff in the US:



Director of Community Engagement & Enrollment Management

Brooks Bonner

Brooks.bonner@tropicalstudies.org

Brooks studied intercultural communications at San Francisco State University and earned a M.A. in International Environmental Policy from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He has spent much of his professional life engaging in community-based conservation and sustainable development programs in Peru and other Latin American countries. Brooks leads OTS’ recruitment efforts, as well as preparing students for their time abroad in Costa Rica and South Africa and should be your main point of contact prior to your departure.

Course Faculty:



Lead Faculty Member

Darko Cotoras, Ph.D.

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Professor Cotoras' research interests are related with the study of the historical processes that create biodiversity, particularly in conditions of isolation. His main study groups are the spiders and other invertebrates from the Pacific Rim and its islands, with special attention to volcanic archipelagos and the Gondwanic landmasses. He combines field and museum work with phylogenetics, population genetics and genomics. Due to his research on understudied taxa and remote locations, he is also interested in biodiversity discovery: species inventories, species descriptions and natural history observations.



Co-Faculty Member

Emilia Triana, M.Sc

Emit773@gmail.com

Emilia is a passionate tropical biologist dedicated to better understand ecology, behavior, and evolution of what she calls the miniature world unknown by many people: the world of terrestrial arthropods. She did her undergraduate and Master's program at the University of Costa Rica, where she studied acoustic behavior, ecology and morphology to reveal that what was considered one species, was actually three different species of treehoppers. Emilia is also passionate about teaching in-field programs, where she believes the hands-on experiences lead the way to a better understanding of the ecosystems and how to research any part within them at a micro or macro scale. She has taught at high school, undergraduate, and postgraduate university levels, in English and Spanish, and all across the small and hyper-diverse Costa Rica, with organizations both from C.R. and the U.S.

Overview of the program

Sites to Be Visited

We will be spending most of our time in four field stations operated by OTS, and we will be visiting one other site. Here we provide a brief description of all the sites. 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.

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.

Las Alturas Biological Station

This premontane site is located in the southeastern region of Costa Rica and serves as a satellite station to Las Cruces Biological Station. The forest at Las Alturas is contiguous with the enormous La Amistad International Park, shared between Costa Rica and Panama. This is a very rustic site with no internet access, limited electricity, phone for emergencies only, and large shared bunk rooms. It can be



quite cool at this site, especially at night, so bring warm clothes. The station is located within a private reserve that also holds a farm that is occupied by a number of members of the Ngobe indigenous people. The adjacent forest includes a hike up the Cerro Chai, famed for an unusual montane cloud-loving flora at its peak.

La Selva Biological Station

Located in the Caribbean lowlands, La Selva is OTS's 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.



Palo Verde Biological Station



Through an agreement with the Costa Rica National Park Service, OTS maintains this 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 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. The park is currently impacted by rice and sugar cane cultivation in surrounding wetlands. It is also unique among Costa Rican parks in that domestic animals (namely, 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. Services available at Palo Verde include internet access and laundry. Palo Verde is the buggiest of our sites, particularly in the wet season, so be prepared for lots of mosquitoes while we are there!

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. 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, stages of undress that are 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 summer 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 important plants and animals, perform field projects with long hours, and make field trips to banana plantations, logging sites, etc. In the field, 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 take a bag 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. We schedule classroom activities in the afternoon to minimize our chances of getting caught in the field in the rain. Our

lectures generally last 1-1.5 hours each; discussions last an hour—sometimes longer if the topic is really interesting.

- 5:00pm Free time. Most students use this space to go running, play soccer, rest, catch up on correspondence, etc.
- 6:00pm Dinner. (You guessed it, among other offerings, rice and beans!)
- 7:00pm Often, we will have 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 “free” time and arrange the schedule to include “lighter” days and fun trips and activities. Also, of course, much of your work is done in beautiful natural settings!

Third, you will have limited personal space this summer. Though you may have one or two roommates on campus, in Costa Rica you will be living closely with close to 15 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. The upside of a field-based program, of course, is that 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 summer.

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 Study 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, don't be afraid to give everything you have to these 4 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 are either before or after the course.

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 are a U.S. citizen, upon arrival in Costa Rica you will be granted an automatic 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.

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, you may not be allowed to enter the country. Some airlines and customs officials will require proof that you are scheduled to leave Costa Rica within 90 days.

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 the evening of the first day of the course. The last day of the program is the earliest departure date for all students. *OTS will not be responsible for your travel or stay neither before nor after arrival and departure dates.*

Money

Plan to have enough money for personal expenses. You will be required to pay for health care, personal effects, mail, sodas, snacks, and souvenirs. Batteries (e.g., for flashlights) are expensive in Costa Rica, so you may want to bring them with you. It is hard to set a standard budget for personal expenses, but unless you plan to do additional traveling after the program or buy lots of souvenirs, \$200–\$400 for personal expenses should be adequate. The unit of currency in Costa Rica is the colón (plural: colones), and as of this writing (June 2022), the exchange rate is about 683 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. You might consider having at least some cash available (\$50–\$100) for immediate exchange upon arrival, but dollars also are accepted almost everywhere in Costa Rica.

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, make sure you have Microsoft Word and Excel programs. It is also beneficial if you have a statistical program such as JMP, which we can provide on a CD for use only during the 4 weeks of the program. At OTS stations, the internet can generally be accessed through a wireless connection.

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 obtain insurance for your computer before bringing it to Costa Rica. Also consider bringing a lock that allows you to secure your computer to the table where you are working.

Whether or not you bring your own computer, you should definitely bring a USB memory card for storing and moving documents and presentations from computer to computer.

Because of the humidity, we also suggest you bring silica gel to protect your electronics.

Health care

Medical Services

If you do not already have health insurance, you need to arrange immediately for international coverage during the summer. *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 your medical expenses.* Contact the OTS offices if you have questions or need any assistance in finding a policy.

Before coming to Costa Rica, make sure you are up-to-date on all 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 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). 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 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. 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.

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 to determine whether the program 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's Traveler's Health 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.*

COVID-19 All students must be fully vaccinated and up to date on any boosters. For accurate information regarding OTS and its policies regarding COVID-19, visit our website (<https://tropicalstudies.org/covid-info/>)

Booster Shots. Make sure you are up-to-date on all 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) Typhoid 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. 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 Panama. 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 This 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.

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.

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.

Communications

Important Names and Numbers

The Organization for Tropical Studies has two primary administrative centers:

OTS North American Office (NAO)	OTS Costa Rican Office (CRO)
Organization for Tropical Studies 408 Swift Ave Durham, NC 27705 USA Tel. (919) 684-5155 Fax (919) 684-5661 undergraduate@tropicalstudies.org	University of Costa Rica, San Pedro, Costa Rica 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
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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 computer calling program such as Skype, which charges 2 cents a minute to call to US phone numbers. 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.

E-mail and Internet

At Palo Verde, Las Cruces, and La Selva you will have access to the Internet, 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 don’t 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 program.

If all this seems complicated, don't 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> Organización para Estudios Tropicales Undergraduate Program Apartado 676-2050 San Pedro 2050 Costa Rica	<i>Your name</i> Organization for Tropical Studies Undergraduate Program CRC341 7801 NW 37th Street 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.

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. You can also use a ride-sharing app like Uber in San Jose and other large cities.
- 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.
- 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 summer 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 or handle 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.
- Never go alone, and 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.
- 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 OTS field stations have clinics nearby for immediate medical attention, and excellent hospitals are available in larger towns and cities for situations requiring more serious attention.

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 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.
- 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=le3v8G5Z5Qc>
- 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.
- 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 Study 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.

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. It is however possible to conduct virtual counseling sessions in some cases.

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 simply cannot 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!

General Advice for Travelers

Sadly enough, as in many parts of the world, Costa Rica is not free of gender-based violence, and in recent years sexual assaults directed at foreign women have occurred throughout the country, even in seemingly peaceful places. Although we encourage women feeling empowered and being able to do as they wish, we also extend some recommendations to minimize the risk of gender-based violence. Please consider travelling in groups, not walking by yourself at night, and making sure people know of your whereabouts if you do decide to travel alone.

The most frequent complaint of young women travelers in Costa Rica has to do with *piropos* (catcalls). There is an ongoing effort from civil society organizations and the current government to eliminate *piropos* from everyday interaction in Costa Rican streets. At OTS we consider *piropos* an unwelcomed sexual harassment. If you think you are being harassed, the best thing to do is not to engage with the offender and look for a police officer (Fuerza Publica). The Fuerza Publica are now trained to deal with street sexual harassment and will be able to help out.

It also is important to keep in mind that travelers have reported sexual assaults by taxi drivers and other app-based modes of transportation. When using taxis or transport apps, make sure they have working door handles, locks, and if riding a red-taxi, working meters (called “marías”). If using a transport app, it is required by them that you seat in the front seat. However, this is not the case for the red taxis, where you normally will ride in the backseat.

Please keep in mind that body language is, like spoken languages, different everywhere you go. We welcome you to express yourself freely, but we also welcome you to use your best judgment regarding apparel in public spaces. What may pass as insignificant in social situations in the US may have different connotations in Costa Rica. If you have any doubts about this, you might want to ask a Costa Rican you can trust. 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.

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Policy

All students are required to read and sign the OTS Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Policy, on the first full day of the program. The full policy can be found at the link below.

[OTS Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Policy for Students](#)

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 Director of Academics in Costa Rica, Sofia Rodriguez at sofia.rodriguez@tropicalstudies.org, +506 2511-6238, or the Chief Administrative Officer, Jennifer Kelley, in the North American Office at jennifer.kelley@tropicalstudies.org, +1 919-684-5774.

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 the Director of Academics in Costa Rica, Sofia Rodriguez sofia.rodriguez@tropicalstudies.org, tel +506 2511-6238, or the Chief Administrative Officer, Jennifer Kelley, in the North American Office at jennifer.kelley@tropicalstudies.org, +1 919-684-5774. 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 and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 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:

- <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CostaRica.html>
- <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/covid-3/coronavirus-costa-rica>
- <https://cr.usembassy.gov>

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>

Emergency Information

Each OTS field station has an Emergency Protocol that all visitors must follow in case of an emergency. These can be found in each room and building throughout the station. Included in these protocols, OTS also has a 24-hour emergency line that you can call in the case of an emergency. **For any emergency during the program, when students are not at an OTS field station, call +506 8309 6105.** The person answering this line and any other emergency lines will be bilingual. This information will also be reviewed during the pre-departure and on-site orientations.

Emergency Numbers:

La Selva: +506 8682 0830

Las Cruces: +506 8681 9690

Palo Verde: +506 8849 1702

Costa Rica Office - Dept of Education: +506 8849 1702

North American Office: +1 919 684 3226

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, sweaty and muddy, from the field. 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 years have complained about not having enough of the following: small field notebooks, batteries, zip lock bags, rain pants, aspirin, bandanas, vitamins, and an alarm clock.

If you have any questions about what to bring, please contact us!

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. Be sure to notify your bank that you will be traveling so they do not place a hold on your account.

_____ **Shirts:** 3 "town" shirts, 2-3 "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:** 1 pair of town pants, 1 pair of lounge/sweat pants, and 2 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:** 3-4 lightweight shorts, a mix of regular and athletic. Some students prefer "zip-off" field pants.

_____ **Swimsuit:** 1-2 suits

_____ **Underwear:** 7-10 pairs, cotton or quick drying 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 Alturas can get quite cold (4 days with night temperatures between 40 and 55 F) and Las Cruces can be quite chilly (occasionally at 50-65 degrees at night with no heaters). *Don't forget to pack ENOUGH warm clothes!*

_____ **Rainwear:** Bring a light breathable rain jacket (or poncho) or an umbrella. Rain pants not recommended.

_____ **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”, “Chacos” 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 the field sites.*

_____ **Shoes:** Some students like to bring 1-2 nice pairs of sandals, sneakers, or otherwise comfortable shoes for walking around, 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.

_____ **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.

_____ **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 15+ 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. 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 month 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 and declare this on your OTS Medical Form.*

_____ **Pocket knife**

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:** 1-2

_____ **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-style bladder in your daypack (to augment, but not replace, your water bottle).

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. 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’ll never regret bringing too many. Garbage bags could also be useful for your boots.

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

- _____ **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.
- _____ **Sleeping bag:** Might only be used in Las Alturas, where it sometimes drops near freezing at night. 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 summer, as well as a great source of memories in the future!
- _____ **Musical instruments:** There is a course guitar, but if you play 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 group.
- _____ **Travel games:** Cards, bananagrams, apples-to-apples or similar games were recommended by past students.

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 US. 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 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 lock on your luggage. If your locks are not TSA standard, then when you go to the airport, leave the locks open so that your luggage can be screened by security, and ask security to lock them again. 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 number on you during your flight as well as any other number shared with you during the Pre-Departure Orientation:
OTS Costa Rican Office: (506) 2524-0607
Don't 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. Be sure you are wearing your OTS t-shirt, mailed to you when you were enrolled in the program.

- 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. We will be holding an OTS sign that says “OTS Study Abroad.” **If you are wearing 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, don't go anywhere! Be patient and just wait.*
- f. Please watch your belongings closely when you exit Customs.

See you in Costa Rica, Pura Vida!