

# Sustainability in Latin America: A Case Study in Costa Rica

Winter 2019



## Study Abroad Program Guide

Office of Study Abroad Programs

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## DESTINATION: COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is one of the most sustainable countries in the world. They rely on renewable energy (> 98% of electricity comes from renewable sources), are attempting to be one of the world's first carbon-neutral countries, have nearly 30% of their land designated as protected forests, do not have a military, and have a happier population than the US.



## SPECIAL NOTES REGARDING OUR DESTINATION

### Climate

Costa Rica has a wet season (May – November) and a dry season (December – April). We'll be visiting in the heart of the dry season! January is the most popular month for tourism in Costa Rica, and fantastic weather throughout the experience is anticipated. With that being said, expect anything and everything. Participants will experience occasional heavy rains, as well as both hot/humid tropical conditions and exceptionally cool days (especially in the cloud forests). Expected average high temperatures throughout the experience are on the order of 80 °F.

### Currency

The currency in Costa Rica is the colón (CRC) or colones (plural). In addition to colones, US dollars are widely accepted throughout the country, though it is best to have some local currency as well. Rates fluctuate, so before departing consult a currency exchange website such

as <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/> to check up-to-the-minute rates. For example, the currency conversion on November 20, 2018 was 1 USD = 591.48 CRC.

### Food (modified from Wikipedia)

Costa Rican cuisine is mild, with reliance on fresh fruits and vegetables. Rice and black beans are a staple of most Costa Rican meals, often served three times a day. Costa Rican fare is nutritionally well rounded, and nearly always cooked from scratch from fresh ingredients. Due to the location of the country, tropical fruits and vegetables are readily available and included in the local cuisine.

Due to the contrast of Costa Rica's large tourist economy with the many rural communities throughout the country, the foods available, especially in the more urban areas, have come to include nearly every type of cuisine in addition to traditional Costa Rican dishes. Cities such as San José and beach destinations offer a range of ethnic foods, from Peruvian to Japanese. Chinese and Italian food is especially popular with *Ticos* (the local name for anything Costa Rican), and can be found around the country. Food is an important aspect of Costa Rican culture, and gatherings are often centered around meals.

### Local Transportation

Our experience in Costa Rica will expose us to diverse regions of the country. As our group travels among these regions, we will rely primarily on a privately chartered bus for transport. We will also have the opportunity to experience public bus transportation at several points during the trip.

### Alcohol

All participants in the program will be of legal drinking age while in Costa Rica. **It is absolutely mandatory that every participant behave responsibly in choices involving alcohol, as the abuse of alcohol endangers not only the individual, but the other participants as well. Alcohol abuse is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program, at the discretion of the Program Director.**

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Official Site of Costa Rica: <https://www.visitcostarica.com/en>

Costa Rica Tourism and Travel Bureau: <http://www.costaricabureau.com/>

Costa Rica Tourist Offices & Information: <https://www.angloinfo.com/costa-rica/directory/costa-rica-tourist-offices-information-237>

US Department of State, Costa Rica Information:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CostaRica.html>

## PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dr. John D. Atkinson is an Assistant Professor of Civil, Structural, and Environmental Engineering at UB, where he has been on the faculty since August 2014. He earned a B.S. degree in Chemistry (with a minor in Mathematics) from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) and then immediately completed his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Illinois' Department of Civil and

Environmental Engineering. His research focuses on Sustainability, Materials Engineering, and Adsorption for Air/Water Pollution Treatment. He teaches Sustainability (CIE 447) and Air Pollution (CIE 461/563) at UB.

John's international travels have been extensive and largely centered in Eastern Asia, including extended research experiences at universities in Taipei (Taiwan), Zhongli (Taiwan), and Qingdao (China). His most recent excursion was a 3 wk sustainability-scouting trip throughout India, identifying new research and educational opportunities for UB students. He's also visited Hong Kong, Seoul (Korea), Tokyo (Japan), and Shanghai (China). He participated in the first ever UB study abroad incubator in Costa Rica, which ultimately motivated the formulation and execution of this experiential learning opportunity. This will be his 2<sup>nd</sup> time teaching CIE 464 in Costa Rica, which he developed with input from UB colleagues.

### Contact information

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## ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The program provides students an opportunity to directly engage with real-world examples of sustainability, simultaneously teaching them to be comfortable in unfamiliar (and potentially uncomfortable!) situations abroad. Themed around agriculture, energy, and eco-tourism, topics particularly unique to Costa Rica, students will participate in regionally specific tours, lectures, workshops, discussions, outdoor activities, assignments, and reflections that are intended to highlight sustainability in practice. By getting out of the classroom and engaging with science and engineering practitioners (displaying both good and bad examples of sustainability), the trip will foster a deeper understanding of the oft-discussed but rarely understood concept. Students are challenged to engage with the local culture and economy while considering what it truly means to be sustainable.

## PROGRAM ITINERARY

You will receive a detailed itinerary for our trip in the coming weeks. Our program itinerary will include a blend of site-visits and hands-on engagement with experiences that expose us to sustainability initiatives in Costa Rica. We are working currently with local partners in Costa Rica to develop an intensive schedule of activities that will take our group to multiple and diverse regions of the country. You can look forward to meeting the leading contributors to sustainability movements in Costa Rica, exploring local sites that illuminate course content, and reflecting on these experiences under the guidance of seasoned faculty.

## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Arrivals: The program begins on Saturday, January 5, 2019. All students are required to arrive in San José, Costa Rica on **January 5 before 6:00 p.m.** Following your successful passage through immigration and customs, the Program Director will meet you at the airport exit (there is only ONE exit).

**The program director would be happy to approve your flight itinerary before you purchase it. Once you have booked your flight, please complete the Flight Information section of the UB Study Abroad online application and upload an electronic copy of your detailed itinerary.**

Departures: The last day of the program is Monday, January 21, 2019. Students will already be near the airport on this date and will be provided transport to the airport in advance of their departing flight.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

Accommodations throughout the trip will include hotel/hostel arrangements and a brief experience living with a Costa Rican host family. In the case of hotel/hostel lodging, you can expect double occupancy rooms in “three star” accommodations. All lodging and meals will be provided during the trip and are included in the program fee.

## **MEALS**

The overwhelming majority of our meals will be eaten as a group, so students will not need to worry about incurred expenses. For days with host families, students will enjoy breakfast and dinner with their hosts.

## **EXCURSIONS**

Excursions are planned to highlight tourism and cultural opportunities in Costa Rica. This includes, but is not limited to, hiking in cloud forests, exploring downtown San Jose, visiting Costa Rican National Parks, swimming and beaching, and visiting volcanoes.

All excursions, including transportation, entry fees, and meals are included in the program fee. Excursions will be group events, as opposed to individual opportunities.

## **PASSPORTS AND VISAS**

Program participants must have a valid passport and are responsible for checking the **expiration date to ensure that it is no less than six months after the day we leave Costa Rica.**

US citizens will NOT be required to apply for a visa to participate in this program. The Office of Study Abroad Programs will provide instructions for students from other countries if they are required to apply for a visa in order to travel to Costa Rica and participate on this program.

## **KEEP YOUR IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS AND ITEMS SAFE**

Carry all important documents such as money, credit cards, passport, and plane tickets with you in your carry-on bag. One of the best ways to keep these items safe from harm is to purchase a holder that you wear under your clothes. These are available from most luggage stores, AAA, etc. and usually in two styles: with a string to wear around neck or with a strap to wear around your waist.

Make two photocopies of your passport and leave one at home with someone you can easily contact should you lose your passport. Hide the other copy in your luggage, separate from your passport. In addition scan and/or copy all bank/credit cards you carry and leave a copy at home with someone

and also upload a pdf that you could easily retrieve online if needed. In the unfortunate event you were to lose your passport and/or bank/credit cards, you will be then able to retrieve the information and contact the appropriate companies.

## **LIVING SAFELY IN COSTA RICA**

Although Costa Rica is famous for its wonderful sandy beaches, it is essential to exercise common sense and understand basic water safety rules, as many beaches have high surfs or riptides that can be quite dangerous, so you will need to be very careful if you decide to go for a swim.

If you are not an experienced swimmer, do not swim out past the breakers or to areas where you cannot touch the bottom. Occurrence of rip currents and heavy surf depend on the beach you visit. That being said, be cautious in any case and informed about swimming conditions. If caught in a riptide, try to stay calm, conserve energy and try to get a surfer's or lifeguard's attention, if possible. DO NOT try to swim back to shore; instead, swim parallel to the beach as only a small area is effected by the riptide and you can often swim to an unaffected area.

Furthermore, Costa Rica is filled with beautiful and exotic animals that will be fun to see and photograph, but should not be touched. In particular, you are advised not to feed the monkeys, to be vigilant and stay on marked trails and follow instructions that are provided to you by the guides and Professor Atkinson to avoid snakes and be sure to shake out your shoes for spiders. Costa Rica is an amazing country and we want you to have a safe, rewarding, and positive experience, so we greatly appreciate you taking such precautions to avoid harm.

### **Additional Advice**

Avoid areas of demonstrations and be careful within the vicinity of demonstrations. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate to violence. Stay current with media coverage of local events and be aware of your surroundings. Avoid showing signs of affluence and carrying large sums of cash.

You are strongly encouraged to sign up for the U.S. Department of State [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive up-to-date safety and security information and help them reach you in case of an emergency abroad, whether natural disaster, civil unrest or a family emergency. This will also help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

## **PACKING INFORMATION & LIST**

### **Guiding Principles:**

- Travel light and only bring what is necessary.
- Plan on carrying the luggage with you on board to ensure you and your luggage arrive together.
- Check with your airline for baggage allowances and carry on regulations (particularly in terms of fluids).
- Plan on bringing clothing that says UB! A shirt, a hat, etc., so you can take photos for the Office of Study Abroad Programs proudly displaying our colors and logo that can be used for the website and other promotional materials.

### **Please pack the following:**

- Clothing:

- ♦ We will experience a climate range from cool (50° F) to hot (95° F)
  - ♦ Our visit coincides with Costa Rica's dry season (but expect humidity and some rain)
  - ♦ No formal attire is required. Costa Ricans dress "sharp casual" and tend to wear shorts only at sporting events or beach outings (though this is changing among youth).
  - ♦ Jeans, lightweight pants, and skirts are great for most of our activities
  - ♦ Polo-type shirts, blouses, and T-shirts are appropriate
  - ♦ One light jacket or sweatshirt for cooler weather
  - ♦ Shorts and swim suit for the beach and pools
  - ♦ Close-toed shoes for walking/hiking (sneakers or all-purpose shoes are fine throughout)
  - ♦ One pair of sandals or flip-flops for evening relaxing and beach use
- Umbrella (the rain can be fierce in Costa Rica!)
  - Sunscreen
  - A hat if you would like additional protection from the sun
  - Insect repellent
  - Towel
  - Toiletries
  - Medications that you take on a regular basis
  - Small flashlight
  - Water bottle
  - Earplugs if you are sensitive to noise when sleeping (Costa Rica tends to be louder than most places in the U.S.)
  - Your preferred remedy for motion sickness, if needed (we will traverse many winding roads)

### **Other Necessities:**

- Journal
- Day Pack
- UB Health Insurance Card / Information
- Important addresses and phone numbers for contacting relatives, if necessary.
- Prescription medication in original container carried on plane with you.

## **ADVICE ON MONEY, PHONE, ETC.**

### **Money**

US currency is accepted at select locations, although exchange rates may not be favorable. Local currency can be withdrawn at ATM machines just as in the US. Alternatively, you may exchange US currency or traveler's checks at money exchange bureaus or even select hotels. Both exchange bureaus and ATMs are located in every airport terminal. The program director recommends bringing \$100 - \$200 in cash as spending money. Meals, admissions, and other necessary expenses are included in the program fee, so cash should only be needed for souvenirs and other personal expenses.

It is recommended that students bring a credit card as a safety precaution, but the program director does not anticipate that participants will need to use it extensively (if at all).

## Personal Electronics

Personal electronics are not needed, and Professor Atkinson **STRONGLY** advises against bringing video games, laptops, etc. You will not be bored on this trip!

## Phones

A cell phone is also not needed for this trip but is not forbidden. Students are welcome to provide the program director's phone number to parents, etc. Students will also have the contact information for their Costa Rican hosts. All that being said, students may be more comfortable with their phones or prefer using their phone cameras. That is fine.

Due to different technical standards, many US cell phones will not work outside of the US (in fact, they don't even work on other US networks). If you have an *unlocked, GSM-capable* phone, *tri-band* or *quad-band*, you can buy an inexpensive local SIM card and service in Costa Rica. This will result in a normal, functioning cell phone with a Costa Rican telephone number that will make/receive calls and/or text messages throughout most of the world. This is recommended as a safety precaution, but is certainly not a required. The program director will have an active cell phone throughout the trip, and students will have the number.

You can also contact your US provider and find out what they offer for international service; if you're happy with it, no problem!

## Time

Costa Rica is 1 hour behind New York.

12:30 PM in Buffalo, NY = 11:30AM in Costa Rica

## Water

Tap water in Costa Rica is safe to drink and, in many areas of the country, quite good. However, it is recommended to refrain from drinking the tap water in most beach destinations and in the most rural and undeveloped parts of the country.

## IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

### UB Study Abroad Programs

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Office Phone (Direct Line): +1 716 645-2174  
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Emergency Phone: +1 716 645-2222 (UB Police – 24 hours)  
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### Program Director

Dr. John Atkinson  
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### Embassy:

United States Embassy San José  
Calle 98 Via 104, Pavas  
San José, Costa Rica  
Tel: (During Business Hours) 506 2519 2000 (in Costa Rica), 011 506 2519 2000 (from the US)  
Tel: (In case of Emergency) 506 8863 4895 (in Costa Rica), 011 506 8863 4895 (from the US)  
Fax: 506 2519 2305 (in Costa Rica), 011 506 2519 2305 (from the US)  
<https://cr.usembassy.gov/>

### Police/Fire/Ambulance emergencies in Costa Rica:

General Emergency	Tel. 911
Fire	Tel. 118
Ambulance/Medical Emergency	Tel. 128