
Costa Rica Winter Session 2018

Sustainability in Latin America: A Case Study in Costa Rica (CIE 464)



Study Abroad Program Guide

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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 the first carbon-neutral country, have nearly 30% of their land designated as protected forests, and have a happier population than the US.

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.

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.

Food (modified from Wikipedia)

Costa Rican cuisine is fairly 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.

Safety

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.

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 also other participants. Alcohol abuse is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program, at the discretion of the program director.**

USEFUL WEBSITES (IN ENGLISH)

- 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>

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). 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

John can be reached at AtkJDW@buffalo.edu.

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 classroom instruction, 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 6, 2018. All students are required to arrive in San José, Costa Rica on **January 6 before 9:00 p.m.** The program director strongly encourages students to consider traveling to Costa Rica on Southwest Airlines flight 602 (departing Baltimore for San José, Costa Rica). This flight is among the most affordable and arrives in Costa Rica in the early afternoon. 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 22, 2018. 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.

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.

ADVICE ON MONEY, COMPUTERS, AND PHONES

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).

Computers

You are welcome to bring a laptop or tablet, but it is not required. Wi-fi internet will be regularly available at lodging locations, but participants should NOT expect daily connectivity. Daily journal assignments will be written by hand.

Phones

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!

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

Please attempt to pack in a **single piece of luggage**. This will inform ease of mobility for our group (our itinerary is ambitious!). In addition to your primary luggage, please bring a **small daypack**. I often pack this in my larger piece of luggage.

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 a beach outing
 - 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)
- Laptop (if you can't live without!). We will often (not always) have access to Wi-Fi in the evenings.

- Mobile phone use: check with your carrier to discern your international coverage while in Costa Rica. As an alternative to using your current plan, you can purchase a SIM in Costa Rica for use in most phones.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

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In Costa Rica:

Program Director: Dr. John Atkinson

Tel. to be provided at later date.

Police/Fire/Ambulance emergencies:

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

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/>