



**S F S** THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# PANAMA

## **Student Field Preparation Guide**

Summer Program 2018

The School for Field Studies (SFS)

**PLEASE READ THIS MATERIAL CAREFULLY BEFORE LEAVING  
FOR THE PROGRAM. BRING IT WITH YOU TO THE FIELD AS IT  
CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION.**

100 Cummings Center, Suite 534-G, Beverly, MA 01915

**P** 800.989.4418 **F** 978.922.3835

[www.fieldstudies.org](http://www.fieldstudies.org)

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# Introduction

This Field Preparation Guide includes everything you need to know to prepare for your SFS Program!

We begin with a reminder list and timeline of the vital tasks you need to accomplish, including what you need to send to SFS prior to departure. There is information about traveling to and from the program, visa instructions, and arrival at the airport on the first day. You will also find background information about the particular country and Center where you will be studying. There is a description of what life is like at your Center on a day-to-day basis and what to expect as far as living conditions. We have included a packing list and some financial suggestions to help guide you in planning what to bring with you. Finally, we have included some resources on safety and traveling abroad.

**Read through the entire Guide** and don't hesitate to contact your Admissions Counselor with any questions.

## **Terms and Regulations Contract:**

Note that as a condition for participation in an SFS program, you are required to document that you have read, understood and accepted all academic, safety, administrative and operational policies, rules and requirements by reading and signing the SFS Terms and Regulations Contract.

# Preparing for Departure

## Preparation Checklist

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Please see the SFS website for PDFs of forms and access to your online account & checklist. Most forms can be submitted online through the account that you created when you applied to your SFS program, but any other forms/information can be submitted by mail, email, or fax:

**The School for Field Studies**  
100 Cummings Center, Suite 534-G  
Beverly, MA 01915

Email: [admissions@fieldstudies.org](mailto:admissions@fieldstudies.org) / [safety@fieldstudies.org](mailto:safety@fieldstudies.org)

Fax: 978.922.3835 (general) / 978.232.1254 (safety)

**Read this Guide carefully in its entirety, including sections on Program Overview, SFS Policies, and Traveling and Living Abroad.**

### To be submitted within 10 business days of acceptance:

**Nonrefundable Program Commitment Deposit of \$250.** Students are not considered enrolled and financial aid applications will not be reviewed until this deposit payment is received. This deadline and these conditions apply to all students, even if your home school is responsible for making the deposit payment to SFS on your behalf.

### To be submitted by the deadline that applies to your session:

**SFS Summer I or Combined:** April 15<sup>th</sup>  
**SFS Summer II:** May 15<sup>th</sup>

**Post-Acceptance Forms:** Submitted electronically through your SFS online account.

- **SFS Terms and Regulations Contract.**
- **Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks Form.**
- **FERPA Notice and Consent.**
- **Passport number and expiration date. **Passport must be valid for at least 6 months after the last day of the program****

### **SFS Medical Forms:**

- **SFS Online Medical Review Form.** Self-disclosure form that you complete online. Submitted electronically through your SFS online account.
- **SFS Physical Examination & Authorization Form.** To be completed by a physician and submitted to the SFS Safety Department via fax, scan and email, or regular mail.
- **Psychotropic Medication Form** and/or **Counseling Questionnaire**, if applicable, to be completed by your prescribing physician and/or counselor, therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist and submitted to the SFS Safety Department via fax, scan and email, or regular mail.

**Please note: No student may enter the field until Final Medical Approval is granted by SFS personnel.**

*This includes receipt and review of the SFS Online Medical Review Form and Physical Exam and Authorization Form. The Counseling Questionnaire, Psychotropic Medication Form, and supplemental documentation from a medical specialist may also be necessary. Inaccurate or incomplete information on any of the SFS medical forms may be grounds for rescinding an offer of admission, recalling a student from the program, or restricting student participation in certain activities. In addition, students are responsible for informing SFS of any changes to their health status that occur after submission of SFS medical forms.*

- **Final tuition payment.** Due based on the timeline below. Invoices will be sent 30 days prior to the deadline listed below. If you are accepted after these dates, you will receive specific instructions from your admissions counselor.

**SFS Summer I or Combined:** April 1st

**SFS Summer II:** April 30<sup>th</sup>

### **Other Preparation To Do's**

- Obtain **passport**/Check to make sure your passport is valid.
- Review **visa** information for your program. See Passport and Visa section of this Field Guide for more information.
- **Re-Entry:** If you are a permanent resident of the U.S. or an international student returning to school in the U.S after the program, please be sure to have the necessary documentation for re-entry into the United States.
- **Obtain required clothing and equipment** (see packing list later in this document).
- **Travel Arrangements:** You will receive specific travel instructions for your program after acceptance. (If you have any questions, please contact your admissions counselor).
- **Schedule a consultation** with a travel doctor or your physician at least 60 days prior to departing for the program. Be sure to review:
  - Your **vaccination history** and requirements for every region in which you plan to travel.
  - **Prescription and over-the-counter medications.** Prescription medications should be in their original, labeled containers. Work with your physician and insurance to ensure you have enough prescription medication to last the full duration of the program, as it is rare you will be able to find the medicine you need in-country.
  - Review and **understand what the specific risks** are for each region and country you will be visiting during the program and any pre- or post-program travel.
  - The **Program Information for Participants and Medical Professionals**, listed on your Physical Exam and Authorization Form. Consider your level of fitness as well as any medical or physical accommodations that may be needed.
- Make sure you have **comprehensive international health insurance** (*required*). Documentation of your insurance is necessary on the SFS Medical Review Form. Check with your provider to make certain that your policy offers coverage outside of the United States and specifically in the country or countries where you are going.
- Make sure your bank/credit card companies know you will be **using your cards abroad**.
- **Configure your laptop** to access your home school's online libraries and e-journals before you arrive in the field (see *Computers and Internet* section for further details).
- **Take care of any obligations or arrangements** you might have at your home institution for the semester following your time abroad. This includes student housing, course registration, campus employment, etc. Opportunities to do this while on program may be limited.
- **Leave center address** (can be found later in this document) for friends and family to contact you.
- **Make two clear copies of your flight itinerary and your passport.** Take one copy of each with you and leave one copy with a friend or family member and save copies in your email inbox.
- **Contact SFS alumni** on campus or as provided by SFS to learn more about what to expect.
- **Swimming** is a large component of the program. **If you are a non-swimmer or if you are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with swimming in open water, please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor immediately.**

# Travel Arrangements

You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements and for paying your travel to and from the program. Please refer to the Travel Instructions for your program. Any questions should be directed to your Admissions Counselor.

## Advantage Travel and Suggested Flights

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You are not required to book all of your travel with our partner travel agency, Advantage Travel, nor is it guaranteed to be the cheapest flight available.

However, there are a number of benefits to booking with Advantage Travel, including:

- ✓ Your itinerary is guaranteed to meet the group pickup/drop off program schedule.
- ✓ Advantage Travel has some influence with airlines to make ticket adjustments in the event of last-minute program date changes or cancellation, lost tickets, or other unforeseen circumstances.
- ✓ This travel agent is familiar with SFS programs.
- ✓ This will be one-stop shopping for your travel plans, both to and from the program and for other trips if you plan to travel during a break or pre/post-program.
- ✓ Advantage Travel can place you on flights with other SFS students from your program when possible!

## Making Your Travel Arrangements

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**Students will be sent detailed instructions for booking travel after acceptance to their SFS program (3-4 months prior to the program).** Please follow these instructions carefully and reach out to your Admissions Counselor with questions.

The Field Staff will meet the group at the airport at the designated time and coordinate transportation to the accommodations in Panama City. If you miss the group pickup time, you will notify SFS and we will coordinate your travel to the accommodations.

**You will book your flight only as far as Panamá City.** The travel to and from Bocas del Toro will be arranged by SFS and the cost is covered by your overall program fees.

Regardless of whether the ticket is purchased through Advantage Travel or another agent, SFS is not responsible for reimbursing travel expenses for programs cancelled or rescheduled due to acts of war or civil unrest, acts of God, strikes, weather, quarantine/epidemics/sickness, government regulations, or failure of equipment, power or communications. Therefore, The School routinely does not authorize its designated agent to issue tickets until 30 days prior to the start of a program.

**If you opt to travel before or after your program,** be sure to check with immigration officials regarding your visa status. Panamá currently allows tourists to stay in-country for up to six months (180 days). The stamp that you will receive upon entry is a tourist visa valid for six months (180 days). It's a great idea to arrange all of your travel before you leave the United States.

**Be sure to join a frequent flyer program!** Also, check with your agent about multiple stops or stopovers; long trips are an excellent opportunity to see other countries or regions for a small fee or at no extra cost, but this usually needs to be arranged at the time of ticket purchase. **CARBON OFFSET:** In an effort to make your summer with The School for Field Studies more sustainable, we ask you to consider a carbon offset for your flights to and from Panama.

**NOTE:** If you are participating in both summer sessions, you will be **responsible for yourself** during the time between sessions as this is non-program time. You will be dropped off at the end of Session 1 and are expected to meet the group for the beginning of Session 2. Drop off and pick up times will be arranged by your field staff. Summer Combined students are permitted to store luggage at the field station between sessions. If traveling after the program, make necessary arrangements for your luggage. **SFS cannot be responsible for transporting or storing luggage before or after the program.**

## Proof of Departure before 180 Days

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Panamanian Immigration Law requires that all visitors present proof of departure within the 180 days permitted with a standard tourist visa for US citizens. Students should have with them a printed copy of their return flight should airport personnel in Panamá or the US request to view it.

## Passport and Visa

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**You must have a passport to enter all of the countries where our programs take place. Make certain that your passport is valid until six months after the program ends.**

Upon arriving in Panamá, US citizens are ordinarily given a 180 day tourist visa. Non-US citizens may, however, require a consular visa. SFS is not responsible for administrative procedures with immigration for traveling or visas not related to the academic program, so if you plan to travel outside of the program and/or stay in Panamá for longer than the program lasts, please check with Panamá immigration.

## Arrival at the Airport in Panama

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When you arrive in Panamá, upon exiting the plane, you will proceed to immigration where you will need to present your passport. You will have your photo taken and you will need to provide a digital thumbprint. On your immigration form, you should indicate that you are visiting Panamá as a tourist. If questioned by an immigration official, indicate that you are visiting Panamá as a tourist. Immigration officials will stamp your passport with a tourist visa which allows you to remain in the country for 180 days. After leaving immigration, you will proceed directly to the baggage claim area. After you pick up your bags, you will need to go through customs and present your completed Customs Declaration Form (be sure to pick one up from your flight attendant during the flight!) and your passport.

If your bags do not arrive, you must complete a lost baggage form at the airline lost baggage desk located in the baggage claim area. Ask that the bags be routed to:

**The School for Field Studies  
Big Creek, Isla Colón-Bocas Island  
Bocas del Toro, Panamá**

SFS staff will provide this address to you at the baggage claim area, if your bags are delayed.

**Please be sure to put your name and The School for Field Studies (SFS), Bocas del Toro, Isla Colón on all luggage tags.**

It is not unusual for bags to get delayed in transit; they usually show up within two days. For this reason, it is a good idea to carry critical items in carry-on luggage in case bags get delayed. For example, include medications, toothbrush, contacts, change of underwear, etc.

## Where to Meet:

The Student Affairs Manager and Center Director will meet you after you have passed through customs and security at Tocumen International Airport, Panama City (Airport Code: PTY). **Upon exiting customs, please turn to your right after exiting the doors.** We will be waiting with an SFS logo t-shirt and/or sign. You will then likely wait at the airport for a little while as your fellow students gather, and then you will be taken to the Ciudad del Saber dorms in Panamá City. You will be spending a couple days in Panamá City, visiting several sites (including the Panamá Canal, Casco Viejo and Panamá Viejo) and you will be introduced to the history and culture of Panamá.

After this field trip, we will fly to Isla Colón in the Bocas del Toro Archipelago as a group departing from Panamá Albrook “Marcos A. Gelabert” International airport. This airport services all domestic flights within Panamá. The total weight limit for checked luggage on Air Panama is 14 kg. You will need to pay excess baggage fees (up to \$2.20 per kilo) on Air Panama if you have checked luggage that weighs more than 14 kg total (30.8 lb), which can be paid by credit card or cash.

Air Panama's baggage regulations are as follows:

- Baggage weighing up to 14 kg will be checked for free (it is by weight, not quantity of bags). For every kg over 14, they charge \$2.20 per kg. So for example, if you are travelling with a total of 50 lbs of luggage (22 kg), you will pay  $8 \times \$2.20 = \$17.60$
- NOTE: WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU NOT BRING MORE THAN 50 LBS OF LUGGAGE
- However, if you do, there is an option to send some luggage via Air Panama Cargo so as to incur a lower fee.
  - For example, if you have one bag weighing 50 lbs (22 kg) and another bag weighing 35 lbs (16 kg), you may choose to check the 22 kg bag (and pay the \$17.60) and then, instead of paying  $16 \times \$2.20$  (\$35.20), you can send the 16kg bag via Air Panama cargo and pay the lower rate of \$1.60 per kg:  $16 \times \$1.60 = \$25.60$ . In this example, with a total of 85 lbs of luggage, you would pay \$43.20.

Note: Most students pay between \$30-\$50 for overweight baggage fees. Please note that Air Panama cargo does not accept aerosolized cans (no sunscreens or hairsprays can be checked in luggage flying cargo). Students must check aerosolized cans in the bag that will be checked at the Air Panama passenger desk (not at cargo).

Keep in mind that the small, domestic Air Panamá plane (max 46 passengers) has stricter carry-on luggage restrictions than your international flight. Air Panamá generally only allows one carry-on (small backpack), which is strictly followed. Air Panamá is reluctant to allow bags with wheels (trolley-bags) as carry-on, even if they will allow a backpack or a wheel-less bag of the same size. This is due to limited overhead cabin space.

Finally, make sure to pack into your carry-on luggage minimal toiletries (as permitted by your airlines), and a change of clothes in the event that your bags get delayed on the international flight to Panamá City, or on the domestic flight to Bocas del Toro.

Air Panamá has limited baggage capacity, so it is possible that your bags may not arrive with you, but on a later flight. If you are bringing more than one large suitcase you should pack one bag with essentials for the start of your trip that will be chosen to arrive with you on your flight (ex. sheets, a towel, bathing suit).

Note that Air Panama charges \$2.20 per pound after 14 kgs of luggage; this is likely much less than your international baggage allowance (as of January 1, 2016). Again, you are allotted a total of 14 kg on the flight. Anything in excess of 14kg is charged \$2.20 per kilo. You have the option to send luggage via cargo which is \$1.65 per kilo. Luggage fees are subject to change, so please check the luggage restrictions on the Air Panama website before your program begins ([www.airpanama.com](http://www.airpanama.com)).

# About SFS Panamá

## About Panamá

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Panamá was inhabited largely by the Chibchan, Chocoan, and Cueva peoples before the arrival of Europeans in 1501. Panamá quickly became a crossroads and marketplace for European trade and shipping. Gold and silver were brought by boat on the Pacific from South America, transported overland to the Caribbean, and then on to Spain. The route across the isthmus was known as the Camino Real. Later, from 1880-1914, the construction and completion of the Panamá Canal allowed for the 82 km (51 mi) trip across the isthmus possible by water instead of overland.

The islands of the Bocas del Toro archipelago were named after Christopher Columbus (Isla San Cristobal and Isla Colón, respectively) who visited the islands on his last voyage to the New World in 1502. The area remained extremely rural and traditional for over three centuries until the ‘discovery’ of green gold – bananas. The towns of Bocas, Almirante and Changuinola were the center of the banana industry.

The legacy of the United Fruit Company, present in the BDT region from the early 1880s until the late 1930s and again from 1950 to present day, operating as Chiquita Brands International in Changuinola, Bocas del Toro, can be felt in every aspect of life and has had unintended consequences for the people, flora and fauna of the region (Stephens, 2008). The United Fruit Company at one point was exporting more fruit to North American and European cities than any other place on the planet.

## Weather and Climate

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Panamá has a tropical climate. The temperatures in Panamá are the same year-round; high 80s to low 90s during the day (real feel 95-102°F). At night, temperatures usually cool off into the mid to high 70s (real feel 80-85°F). Panamá experiences multiple rainy and dry seasons, though it is generally very humid for much of the year. Most people prefer to characterize the Bocas region’s weather by saying that there are times when it is “less wet” and there are times when it is “more wet”, but in general, be prepared for the wet! The rainy seasons are from late May to early August and again from late November to mid-January. The dry (or “less wet”) seasons are usually from mid-August to early November and again from late January to mid-May. The rainy (or “more wet”) season varies from heavy, continuous downpours to intermittent rain with bright sun.

Please note that unlike in other tropical climates, Bocas del Toro does not usually experience rain only in the afternoon for a few hours followed by the sun coming out again. There are times when rain will last for days or for a week and there are times when we will experience no rain and multiple weeks of sun. During those rainy days expect slightly cooler temperatures, and during dry days or weeks, be prepared for very sunny and hot days!

Though Panamá is on the Caribbean, it very rarely experiences hurricanes. Hurricanes originating off the coast of Africa are moved by prevailing winds and steering currents westward and northward. A few brush the northern coast and islands of South America along 11 degrees latitude north of the Equator, however, Panamá is ‘tucked away’ at 9 degrees latitude below the reach of hurricanes. The same holds true of all hurricanes spawning in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Bocas del Toro is in the wet tropical zone, according to the Holdridge Life Zone scheme and experiences much heavier and more frequent rain than the rest of the isthmus. The average rainfall each year is about 4 meters (140 inches) and the average temperature is 85 °F (30 °C). For comparison, the average rainfall each year in Boston, MA is 1.25 meters (50 inches).

## Geography and Ecology

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Panamá is the southernmost country in Central America, bordering the Caribbean and the Pacific on the narrow and low elevation Isthmus of Panama. It is about 78,000 square kilometers in area and about 770 kilometers in length and between 60 and 180 kilometers in width. The western Caribbean coastline is the home of the Bocas del Toro archipelago.

In the center of the country, run the chain of mountains and hills that form the continental divide, called the Cordillera de Talamanca near the Panamá-Costa Rica border and the Serranía de Tabasara and Sierra de Veraguas in the east and central parts of the country. As a whole, the range is called the Cordillera Central. The formation of this range, through tectonic movement and volcanic activity, formed the connection between North and South America, 'The Great American Biotic Interchange (GABI)' between 3 to 5 million years ago, leading to the exchange of people and culture, wildlife, and plants between the two continents. The closing of the isthmus changed the world forever by separating the Atlantic from the Pacific and altering weather and ocean circulation patterns.

The tropical environment of Panamá supports a rich diversity of plants and animals. There are about 10,000 species of plants, 790 hectares of coral reefs on the Caribbean coast, many types of sea turtles, fish, snakes, lizards, mammals and a rich avifauna of over 900 species.

## Panamanian Society

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Due to Panamá's unique location as a transit point and because of people migrating to work on the railroad, the Canal, and banana plantations, the majority of the population is ethnically a mix of Spanish, indigenous, Chinese, and African descent. Full and part-time residency of North American and European immigrants (ex-pats) has become very common in the last decade.

Many immigrants from the United States, Canada, Europe and South America have also settled in the region and make up approximately 25% of the population throughout the Bocas del Toro archipelago. In Bocas del Toro, Spanish is the official and dominant language; English is a common second language spoken by Afro-Antilleans and by many businesspeople and other professionals. Ngäbere is frequently spoken by the Ngäbe people in the Bocas archipelago and Guari-Guari, similar to Jamaican Patois is spoken by many Afro-Antilleans. The population of Panamá is approximately 3.6 million of which more than half the population lives in the Panamá City-Colón metropolitan corridor. English is spoken broadly in the Bocas del Toro region, especially in the Afro-Antillean population. In Bocas del Toro, Spanish is the official and dominant language and English is a common second language

Panamá is rich in folklore and popular traditions. Salsa music is a Panamanian specialty, and Ruben Blades its best-known performer. Equally as popular are Reggaeton, which was born in Panamá, Calypso, Latin jazz, Tamborito and música Típico. Indigenous influences dominate handicrafts such as the famous Kuna textile, *molas*. Most people do not leave Bocas without purchasing a handmade "chachra", a purse made of natural fibers from plants called "pita" that grow here.

## Program Overview

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Panamá is the great connector between two continents – a corridor that links the natural riches of North and Central America to South America. Few places on Earth can claim the density of species and ecosystem richness that this isthmus can. Among its reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, estuaries, and rivers, this region boasts a variety of reef/game fish, turtles, and dolphins, as well as more novel species such as manatee, monkeys, and caiman.

While this course emphasizes the human dimensions of tourism, students become familiar with the biodiversity of the islands, paying particular attention to the natural elements that attract tourists to the region. Walking through farms and forests and snorkeling in the clear waters of the archipelago, students see a variety of tropical habitats—coral reefs, mangroves, lowland rainforest—and fauna, including poison dart frogs, howler monkeys, sloths, and bottlenose dolphins. They also visit popular tourist destinations, observe tourist activities, and learn to use various assessment techniques to measure and analyze tourism practices and tourism impacts on ecosystem function.

Our classroom in Panamá is the archipelago of Bocas Del Toro, a place where forest and shore come together and present almost limitless opportunities to study the ecology and conservation of both the marine and terrestrial resources. It is the dynamic interface between forested islands and life-filled waters that will drive our learning of fragile habitats, natural resource use, and indigenous ways of life based on relationships that are deeply dependent upon a healthy environment.

**Swimming and snorkeling are frequent on this program. If you are a non-swimmer, please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor immediately!**

SFS students will come away with an understanding of livelihood strategies of island residents, population structure of key species, and habitat arrangements and conditions of the archipelago. The goal of the research program is for SFS students and faculty is to describe the environmental and social conditions of the islands, identify problems, and examine the responses by society aimed at mitigating pressures and restoring balance in the environment. Conservation, resource use, forest preservation, and marine species monitoring are extremely important to local farmers and fishers, resource managers, and concerned community groups.

With the results of our research, we offer advice to local decision-makers and create links between our staff and the stakeholders involved in tropical island system conservation and management.

SFS students are involved in community engagement projects and social activities such as:

- Participating in community service trips to help local conservation groups and communities, ex. trail restoration with the Popa II community
- Meeting with Ngäbe leaders to learn more about their culture and their efforts to promote their role in land management and sustainable natural resource use.
- Hosting community lectures or workshops.
- Attending community festivals such as Días de Patria (November) and Carnaval (February) and developing sustainability fairs in the park.
- Environmental education activities, playing sports like soccer, volleyball or frisbee, teaching children to swim, beach clean-ups, and creating content for talks with local fishermen and boat drivers about coral reef health and conservation, and many other activities.

## **Bocas del Toro**

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Bocas del Toro (Bocas Town) is the hub of the archipelago, and has a population of about 5,000. It is located 5 minutes by boat or 7 minutes by car from the field station. Bocas Town has many amenities including several hotels and hostels, restaurants, bakeries, markets, parks, a bank, two ATM machines, a hospital, dentist, police and fire departments, bars, pool halls, beaches, and an airport providing daily service to Panamá City. Bocas del Toro can be accessed by airplane, or by ferry (1 hr) or water taxi (30 min.) from the port of Almirante on the mainland. Bocas del Toro residents are very friendly and thousands of tourists visit here yearly.

Southeast of Isla Colón lies Isla Bastimentos (“Old Bank Island”) which is home to Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park. This park covers an area of 13,226 ha and was primarily established to protect the abundant coral reefs in the region. The Park also protects a swath of the island's interior as well. The most spectacular coral reefs occur near Cayos Zapatillas (Zapatilla Cays), which lie to the south of Isla Bastimentos. The geology of Isla Bastimentos is similar to Isla Colón, with a hilly interior, mangroves on the west side and a 6 km beach (Playa Larga) on its east side.

The remaining islands of the archipelago include Isla Solarte, Isla Carenero, Isla San Cristóbal, Isla Popa, and Isla Cayo Agua. Isla Popa has the largest Ngäbe population of any of the islands in the archipelago. An additional interesting site is the spectacular Bird Island, a protected nesting place for brown booby and red-billed tropicbirds, among other species.

Just north and west of Isla Colón, across the Boca del Drago inlet, lies a region of Panamá's mainland known as the Soropta Peninsula. This peninsula hosts a myriad of wildlife in its extensive primary forest, including howler, capuchin, spider and night monkeys, a striking array of reptiles and amphibians, and very high bird and plant diversity. Its geologic history has resulted in hilly topographical features consisting of swamps and ridges throughout the region.

## Facilities

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The Tropical Island Biodiversity Studies (TIBS) program is based on Isla Colón at a former surf hostel. The Center is located approximately 2.5 miles Northeast of Bocas Town and is accessible by boat and car. Whether traveling to Bocas Town by boat or car, a one-way trip will cost \$2-3.00. At night, prices for boats increase and a one-way trip back to the Center during the evening hours by boat (after dusk or 6pm) will cost \$5-6.00 per person.

The Center provides comfortable living quarters for all students and some staff. Students are housed in dormitory style accommodations with two sets of bunk beds per room. Each room has one bathroom with one shower and one toilet. You will be sharing a room with 2 or 3 other students. Each student will have space to keep their belongings, however the space is limited. You will be able to hang some items and fold and store all remaining items.

In addition, each room has air conditioning and one standing fan. Note that air conditioners are only allowed to be turned on during certain times of day and must be turned off when traveling off site as a means for conserving energy. The Center has a student lounge, a library/laboratory, indoor/outdoor classroom, kitchen, a dining area (also used as a study area during the evening), pool, beach volleyball and waterfront access. The ocean is your backyard!

There are laundry facilities on-site for students to do their own laundry. Each room will be assigned a day to do laundry during the week. You will be able to do laundry once per week, but we encourage students to share space in the machines to conserve water and electricity. Due to water shortages and frequent power outages, some laundry days may be canceled. Please bring enough clothing and extra sets of undergarments to get you through at least one full week.

Faculty and staff including the Center Director, one faculty member, the Student Affairs Manager (SAM), the Student Affairs Assistant (SAAS), Site Manager, Community Coordinator and Cultural Liaison (CCCL), and intern live at the Center as well. The Center provides space for faculty and staff offices and for an evening security guard and check-in area. Surrounding the property is the ocean and directly across the street from the Center lives several families with large farms. It is common to hear the sounds of birds, howler monkeys, frogs and insects in this area.

## Library and Computers

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**Please bring your own laptop to the Center.** The Center does have extra laptops on hand, however, they are for research purposes and must remain in the laboratory and cannot be moved. Therefore, having your own laptop helps to alleviate some of the stress involved during critical assignment periods, such as when computer access is in high demand. As a general recommendation, this should be a PC less than 6 years old, containing Microsoft Office 2003 or later software, or office software that can export Microsoft Office compatible documents. Your laptop must have USB portals as many assignments are given and corrected via the sharing of USB drives. **Tablets are not sufficient** for all the file transferring, data manipulation and analysis, and writing that you must do during the semester, so please **do not rely on only a tablet for your course work!!** Again, all computers must have USB ports. Students will have access to the public drive on the Center computers located in the laboratory, as well as professor USB drives, however please note that you will need to download assignments and transfer them to your computer either via email or USB. We suggest bringing at least two USB drives with you.

Every semester, Apple computers have not held up very well in the humid conditions of Bocas del Toro. **The humidity and damp conditions have caused several Apple computers to overheat and the internal fans die.** In the fall 2017 semester, 4 Apple computers failed. At times you will be working outside with your computers, therefore do not expect to have your computer in air conditioned spaces at all times. SFS highly discourages bringing Apple computers to Bocas del Toro. It is recommended to bring a lower-cost PC and leave your more expensive Apple computer at home. While Apple computers seem to be more susceptible to overheating, there have been PC failures as well. It is highly recommended that you invest in a cooling pad or docking station for your computer. **Make sure to fully back up your computer before leaving home and consider bringing a few USB drives with lots of memory or a hard drive to back up your personal computer. We recommend purchasing or extending repair insurance for your laptop. In general, computers and electronics do not withstand the high humidity of Bocas very well. We recommend bringing a cheaper PC with you on program. Note: Bring Apple computers at your own risk.**

**With both new and old laptops, in order to be prepared for technical difficulties:**

- Consider bringing a spare battery
- Consider bringing a spare charger
- Bring a laptop sleeve or waterproof case with moisture absorbing material and use it any time the computer is not in use!

**With touchscreen computers and tablets:**

- Order water proof and water resistant cases whenever available
- Keep stored in a protective sleeve whenever not in use

**Data backups**

- Back up your computer prior to entering the field and leave that backup at home!
- Plan to store your data on an external hard drive during the program in addition to the cloud!
- Internet is not always available, so do not plan to rely solely on the cloud for storage

We have a few student laptops available for school assignments and readings. However, we can not accommodate more than 2-3 students on these laptops at a time. If your computer fails, be prepared to share a student computer with other students in the laboratory. **Please back up all files on a hard drive or USB at all times.**

Files can be transferred between your personal laptop and the Center's computers, using your own USB flash drive. You will not be able to connect your laptop directly to the Center network or printers. You should also bring a portable surge suppressor, a laptop carrying case, and a security cable or lock to protect your laptop. It is also highly recommended that you bring a re-sealable bag and silica gel packets to protect your computer from the high humidity in Bocas.

Though SFS does its best to update its library accordingly, you should plan to rely on the databases and online library available to you through your home institution during your SFS program. SFS does not provide additional access to any e-library resources from our Centers. Before arriving in-country for your SFS program, you should make arrangements with your home school to have remote access to your library's online journals, as you will use this very often during your program. **Make sure you know your remote library log-in and password, understand your home school's policy on accessing library materials remotely, and configure your laptop to access your school's online libraries and e-journals before you arrive in the field.**

Note that SFS cannot accept responsibility for ensuring the safety of students' personal computers, either onsite or in the field. Personal laptop insurance coverage can often be obtained through the credit card used to buy the equipment (check with your credit card company), or through homeowners' insurance.

You will be responsible for backing up and managing files saved on your personal laptop or in any other location outside of your network storage folder. **Be sure to take your project data with you upon completion of the program, as it will not be available from SFS later.**

## Food

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All meals are provided in the dining area and are prepared by local staff. The Staff of the Day and rotating groups of students (Cook Crew and Student of the Day) assist in breakfast, lunch and dinner setup and cleanup. In addition, students are responsible for compost maintenance. The kitchen staff will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner every day except on Sundays. **Each individual is responsible for preparing his or her own meals (with access to the main kitchen, leftovers, basic supplies, and supplies for sandwiches) or finding other dining options on Sundays.**

We make an effort to provide snacks such as fruit, drinks (tea and coffee), bread and spreads at designated times. Students have access to a refrigerator and shelf space to store snacks purchased in town. If you desire any food item beyond what is provided, you will need to travel to town to purchase your own supplies. Snacks located in SFS cabinets are for field trips and program time only and are not for student use.

On special occasions, such as birthdays, we are sure to celebrate with cake or other treats!

## Special Religious Requirements

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If you have questions regarding a religious holiday which falls during program time, please contact your Admissions Counselor immediately upon acceptance. Schedules often involve complex coordination with many parties and reservations are often made months in advance.

## Cleaning

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Groups of students will rotate to help with cleaning and composting every day after each meal (this is usually designated to the cook crew of the day). Also, there is a general cleaning rotation in which each student of the day has to perform various tasks on their day. These tasks include tidying the dorms (this is usually done amongst dorm mates), the student lounge and other public spaces, and performing other Center maintenance tasks as deemed necessary.

## A Typical Day at the Center

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### 6 days a week (one day off)

0730	Eat breakfast
0810	RAP (Reflection, Announcements, Physicality)
0830	Field work and/or lectures
1230	Lunch
1400	Field work and/or lectures
1700	Field work wrap up
1800	Dinner
1900	Evening activity or free-time/trips to town

## A Typical Week at the Center

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Our weekly schedule in Panamá will vary significantly throughout the program. **We ask that all students remain flexible at all times as weather conditions and guest lecturer schedules can change at any moment.** After the first few days of orientation and organization, the program will include about **15 lectures a week**, plus three to five other meetings (organizational, research/paper presentations, guest lectures) and fieldtrips. The mornings are usually filled with lectures, both in the classroom and the field, and field trips. Afternoons are generally filled with additional academic and fieldwork and Spanish lessons (Formal Spanish lessons are three times a week for two weeks at the start of the semester). Some academic activities will occur at night, especially if it is very hot during the day. Most of these activities take place in and around the Center, but many of them involve traveling throughout the Bocas del Toro archipelago..

**Academic scheduling is on a six day/week schedule.** This is a very rigorous program and it will take a few weeks to fully adjust to your new schedule. Come prepared to learn and study daily.

**Please be aware that you will only receive a weekly schedule and you will not always know the upcoming lectures or fieldtrips for the following weeks.** This is due to the variable nature of the weather and availability of guest lectures or fieldtrips. Unlike at your home institution, your classes may not meet at the same time each week. In Panamá, time is valued differently and tardiness is not always frowned upon. However, for scheduled lectures on campus, it is expected that you will always arrive on time.

**Please come with an open mind and be prepared for a schedule that is constantly in flux.**

Throughout the program, one day a week is reserved studying and relaxing (Sunday). While staff are provided with periodic days off throughout the program period, at least one staff member is always on duty.

**Center Hours:** Due to the residential nature of SFS programs, there curfew. **The sign-in time is 10:00 PM Sunday through Friday, and 11:00 PM on Saturday.** We will present specific information regarding Center closing hours for weekend and week away during Orientation at the beginning of our program.

**Quiet hours:** Begin at 10 pm every night. This policy is in place to ensure common courtesy, respect and harmony within the SFS community and the larger community; our neighbors work in various locations and go to bed very early. Although you must be on site after curfew, you will not be confined to the dorm. There are designated areas on campus for conversations and activities to continue after 10 pm. Please keep in mind that while others want to socialize, other student may be using areas close by to study or rest. Communication between students is the key to a happy group!

You will be sharing a room with up to three other students. Please be kind and courteous by following all Center rules and regulations.

## Students and the Local Community

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During your SFS program in Panamá, you will have the opportunity to learn about and participate in the culture of Panamá. You will be involved in various activities that enable you to work directly with the community. Our academic and service activities serve the purpose of connecting our students with members of the community.

Please remember that what is considered acceptable or appropriate varies from culture to culture and be sensitive to this when you are away from the Center or interacting with community members. The staff will brief you on this in more detail during Orientation.

Please note that the Ngäbe are very conservative and it is important to dress appropriately. That means dressing modestly when visiting local communities on neighboring islands.

## Language

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**There is no prerequisite for Spanish for students participating in this program,** however speaking Spanish will greatly facilitate all interactions with community members, participation in field exercises, and personal experience in Panamá. Realize that although the program is taught in English, several of our field experiments include speaking with community members in Spanish to collect data on which you will be evaluated.

Keep in mind that the amount of Spanish you learn will be up to you and how much effort you put into it.

## Intersession Break

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Students participating in both summer sessions will have a five-day intersession break between sessions. During this time, the Center is closed and students are responsible for their own travel and accommodations. In the past, students have used this time to travel with friends, family, or other students. Before the intersession break, staff will brief you on current health and safety concerns as well as necessary precautions for traveling in the host country and/or surrounding countries. You are advised to travel in groups of two or more and will be given emergency contact numbers to carry with you during the break. You should also plan to submit a rough itinerary, with phone numbers where possible, prior to the break.

**Intersession Break dates are set and travel must be done within this established time frame. Individual early departures or late returns will not be permissible.**

## Storing Personal Items after the Program Ends

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Due to space limitation, and insurance and liability issues, students are not permitted to store personal belongings at the Center after the program ends. Students must make appropriate arrangements for their belongings.

## Communications

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### Internet

Wireless Internet is available at the Center. The Internet is **EXTREMELY** weak and slow. Keep in mind that it has a finite capacity and is **MUCH** slower than you are accustomed to at home. Excessive data-hungry use (e.g. streaming videos, movies, etc.) will slow the network for everyone. You also have the option of going into town to use WiFi. You should bring your own laptop, as this will undoubtedly make your life easier, especially at research project write-up time. A few designated SFS computers connected through a separate network are also available, but they are restricted to research/academic purposes only.

The following actions are prohibited:

- Downloading any non-research related files.
- Downloading or streaming large files, especially audio/video files (ex. Netflix).
- Downloading any software application
- Gaining unauthorized access to remote Internet systems or abusing Internet systems or Internet users.
- Taking actions that compromise the security of the center network.
- Representing The School for Field Studies in any manner.
- Distributing SFS-owned knowledge or propagating falsified information about SFS.
- Spamming, hacking, virus distribution, etc.
- Illegally copying or redistributing copyrighted material.
- Viewing pornographic or illegal content.

In the event of any violation of this policy, SFS reserves the right to suspend or terminate any or all Internet access.

Please remember that you will be on an island where there are frequent power outages. During power outages, you will have **NO ACCESS** to WiFi. Use this time to connect with human beings and enjoy your time with your classmates and staff.

### Telephone

Upon arrival to Panamá, you will receive a basic cell phone and Panama phone number. Your Panama phone is not a smart phone, however, you will be able to place calls and text. You will be asked to purchase a calling card in order to place a call home. Phone cards are sold in various amounts (\$5, \$10 and \$20) at the airport and all over Bocas Town. **Students are required to keep their cell phone charged and with minutes at all times. These phones are the only way in which staff can contact students in the event of an emergency.** Phone cards are sold in Bocas town at all stores. You will be able to provide friends and family with your personal cell phone number, and they can call you without any charge to you. If so desired, you may place the SIM card of your issued Panamanian phone into your personal smart phone.

We recommend downloading and communicating with family members and fellow students and staff via “Whatsapp”. Unlike in the US where SMS texting is widely used, Whatsapp is the preferred method of communication in Panama and throughout Central and South America due to limited numbers of SMS texts allowed on calling plans. Whatsapp is free and now offers video calling in addition to its basic functions, including texting and voice messaging. It may also be helpful for your family to arrange an international plan while you are away, if you plan on communicating often with family members at home.

You should also refer family members to the Emergency Contact section of this guide for information on how to contact you during an emergency. Cell phone service can be spotty throughout the archipelago with certain areas outside of the service area.

## ***Mail***

Sending mail to Bocas del Toro using the Panamanian Postal Service is extremely unreliable. We don't recommend that your friends or family try to send you mail via the Panamanian Postal Service; letters take about 1 month to receive. **If you have prescription medicines, make sure to bring enough for the entire session, as you will not be able to receive this through the mail.** You will be liable for all applicable customs duties which may be very expensive (up to 200% of value!), depending on what you receive. Retrieving packages is extremely difficult and burdensome and most items you might be getting through the mail can be purchased in the country anyway. Given the above, you should plan to pack and carry with you everything you will need for the duration of the program.

However, there exists the option to send mail to the address listed on the mbebocas.com (Mailboxes Etc.) website. If you choose this option, please note that you will have to pay a-la-cart for all mail received. A letter costs \$4 and packages cost \$17/kilogram. Please note that this service is very expensive. It is highly recommended that you bring all items with you that you will need for the semester as receiving mail in Bocas is very expensive.

In general, students who continue traveling after the program often try to lighten their load by leaving items for donation at the end of the program rather than paying for overweight luggage on their way home. Donations left at the end of the semester are given to local employees and their extended families and are greatly appreciated.

## ***News from the Field***

Be sure to let your friends and family know to check SFS News from the Field ([www.fieldstudies.org/blog](http://www.fieldstudies.org/blog)) often! Updates will include photos, posts from the faculty on what students have been doing most recently, as well as entries from students with their thoughts about their experience. It's a great way for your loved ones to follow your exciting adventures!

# What to Pack

SFS's packing list includes all items that are essential for this program. The list was compiled based on feedback from past students and current staff. **You should bring these items with you to the Center.** We recommend that these items be purchased before you arrive because there will be very few shopping opportunities and limited selection once you are in Panamá. Make sure all equipment is in good shape before leaving: check for leaks, broken straps, jamming zippers, etc. In addition, **any equipment or shoes that have dried dirt on them need to be thoroughly washed off prior to packing** or you may be delayed when passing through customs.

SFS highly recommends packing in your carry-on bag: two changes of clothes, basic toiletries and essential medications, one warm garment, camera and any other essential items that would be needed to survive for three days after arrival; luggage is occasionally misplaced for that long. Most airlines allow two pieces of checked luggage plus one carry-on bag that can fit under the airline seat. **Please contact your specific airline for more detailed requirements on size, weight and additional fees.**

Be sure to put the Center street address provided earlier on your luggage tags and inside your bag. Traveling light is recommended. (Note: customs officials may break locks on luggage. Given the rigors of the field, and in the interest of waste reduction, please consider repairing or borrowing items or buying used equipment rather than purchasing new).

## **A note about packing:**

We will fly to Bocas del Toro as a group departing from Albrook airport, which services all domestic flights within Panamá. **Please be sure to have a change of clothes in your carry-on bag (a pair of shorts, a t-shirt, something to sleep in, undergarments and a toothbrush).**

Please pack in bags that you can carry on your own. **You are responsible for transporting your own luggage at all times.** Backpacks and duffels with wheels are great travel companions; use luggage you are comfortable carrying and transporting and that can be stored under a bed.

Be sure to put luggage tags with your name, email address, and SFS/Bocas del Toro, Isla Colon on all of your bags. Traveling light is recommended. Please make sure your equipment is in good condition before leaving. (Note: customs officials may break locks on luggage.)

For the Panamá program, consider breathable rain gear and quick-drying clothes, as it rains often!

## **Electrical Appliances**

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Electricity in Panamá is the same voltage and plugs are the same shape as in the USA.

## **Required Items**

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**Please keep in mind that this packing list does not have amounts suggested, due to high variation in needs among students so please pack according to your own needs.** Bocas is **REALLY** wet, everything will get moldy at some point and clothes remain wet for long periods of time. We recommend light cotton and polyester/spandex-blended items that dry quickly. Heavy cottons do **NOT** do well here.

## **Required clothing**

- **Casual shorts**
  - Very short shorts, 1-2 inch inseams, are not appropriate. Longer shorts must be worn in the indigenous communities).
  - **Jean shorts and light weight athletic shorts** are great for Bocas.
- **Athletic shorts** (for running, taking walks or going about town)
- **Long, lightweight pants (1-2 pairs)**
  - Loose, fast-drying cotton or nylon pants are ideal; zip-offs are VERY useful.

- You are required to wear long pants in the forest to protect yourself from biting insects (mosquitos, spiders, ants etc.) Note: Mosquitos can bite through leggings and tights.
- We recommend only bringing one pair of jeans (it is usually too hot to wear them).
- **Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts (2) for protection against insects, sun, and cooler temperatures.**
  - We highly recommend Columbia sportswear style PFG shirts, which keep you cool and protected in the heat while in the forest. You are required to wear long-sleeved shirts in the forest to protect yourself from biting insects (mosquitos, spiders, ants etc.)
- **Short-sleeved shirts and/or tank tops**
  - Please bring enough to last you for at least 10 days.
- **Lightweight jacket or sweatshirt (1) and/or sweatpants (1)**
  - It can get chilly at higher elevations or if a storm comes through and the temperature drops. If you plan on traveling over the break or after the program, consider bringing warmer clothing with you.
  - Also, if the A/C is running in the evening, you may want to wear a sweatshirt if your roommates prefer a cooler climate.
- **Light raincoat (1) and rain pants (rain pants are optional)**
  - We recommend these items for dryness, not warmth; a waterproof shell that is also breathable is the most effective. An umbrella is also very effective for walking around town and for unexpected rainstorms.
- **Nice clothing**
  - To wear in town; an evening out in Bocas (restaurant or going dancing), or for interviews with community members.
- **Pants/clothes to get dirty and/or wet while working in the field/field pants and shirts**
  - Again, field pants and long-sleeved shirts are required for work in the forest. For snorkel trips, a long-sleeved rash guard is required.
  - Your clothing will get wet on the boat, please come prepared with clothing that you don't mind getting dirty and wet.
- **Swimsuits or Swim shorts/trunks/boardshorts (3-4 sets)**
- **Socks**
- **Underwear (bring enough for 10 days)**
- **Rubber boots are REQUIRED.**
  - Rubber boots are required when we are in the forest due to the presence of venomous snakes.
  - It is muddy in Panamá! (if you have large feet, bring them with you, if you have smaller feet then these can be bought in town or borrowed at the center, however please note that the Center has limited sizes available )
- **Sneakers or running shoes**
- **Trail shoes (optional, for travel after program or for hiking)**
- **Hat(s), for sun and rain**
- **Sunglasses**
  - Polarized lenses work best, especially when we are out on the water
- **Sport sandals**
  - Flip flops, Teva-, Chaco-or Keen-style sandals
  - Note: You will often be required to wear closed toed shoes while on field trips.
- **Pajamas**
  - Bathrooms are open air in some of the places in which we stay, and are shared between students, volunteers, and guests, so pajamas should be appropriate for use in these spaces.

## Required Personal Items and Toiletries

- **Personal toiletries:** These can be purchased in town however, if you are very particular about the brands that you use, there is not a wide selection available in Bocas. The majority of products are produced by Colgate, Johnson & Johnson, UniLever and other large corporations. You will not have the same selection that you are used to at home.
- **Basic Medications:** There are a couple of basic pharmacies in town. However, many medicines you might be used to purchasing at home might not be available. We strongly encourage that you bring a basic medications such as: cold medicine, Tylenol (acetaminophen), any immune system boosters you might take such as airborne and vitamin C, ibuprofen and allergy medicine. Herbal supplements and allopathic medicines are difficult to find in Bocas.
- **Personal first aid kit:** You know your own special needs. During field trips out of urban areas, we carry a first aid kit for emergencies. Otherwise, you will have to purchase medicine or supplies that you will need. It will be less expensive (and you will find greater selection) if you bring these items from home. You should bring over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cold medicine, yeast infection kits etc. You should also have an epi pen (if necessary), Band-Aids, antiseptic cream, anti-itch (hydrocortisone) cream, lip balm, sunscreen, personal hand sanitizer, motion sickness medication (enough for the duration of your time in Bocas), supplements you regularly take, and supplies for any other personal needs, etc.
- **Glasses or contact lenses.** Consider bringing an extra pair and lots of solution (though solution can be bought in town). To replace your contacts in Panamá, you will have to pay for a complete eye exam and wait at least a month to receive the lenses. Glasses take a week. Contact lens cases are difficult to find in Bocas.
- **Soap and Shampoo:** We highly encourage students to bring **biodegradable** soaps, shampoos and conditioners. These are very difficult to find in Panama and are not readily available in stores in Bocas. The water system in Bocas is old, and used water is often dumped back into nature without proper treatment. Students also have access to an outdoor shower that can be used after swimming in the ocean and pool. (**Brands that are Biodegradable:** Jason's Natural, Kiss My Face, Nature Gate-Rainwater, Dr. Bronners, Tom's of Maine, Desert Essence and some Aveda products)
- **Sunscreen.** SPF 30 or greater. This is expensive to purchase in Panamá and especially in Bocas (range is from \$10-14). Please consider bringing a maximum of 2 bottles to reduce plastic waste.
- **Insect repellent and anti-itch cream.** An effective repellent is recommended. Panama is a tropical country and does have its fair share of bugs including and most commonly, biting ants, chitra (sand flies) and mosquitos. However, with proper repellent and clothing you can avoid these pests and their bites. You might consider natural repellants (e.g. Natrapel, Repel Natural or coconut oil and lemongrass/citronella oil that you can source locally in Bocas). You should research the effects of DEET before choosing to bring it, but if you intend to use repellent with this ingredient, you should make sure it contains no more than 35%, as it can be harmful in stronger concentrations. Anti-itch cream/lotion/gel may also be helpful such as an anti-histamine cream or 2% hydrocortisone cream (e.g. Benadryl stick).
- **Record of international travel immunizations.** This can aid in diagnosis and/or treatment should you get sick.
- **Tampons/sanitary pads and other toiletries:** This can be purchased in Panamá, though only one brand of tampon is available in Bocas. We recommend considering alternatives to disposable products such as the 'DivaCup' if possible. Benefits to the Diva Cup or other similar feminine products are as follows: reduction in solid waste and the ability to wait more hours before changing which is useful when working longer hours in the field or while out on field trips.

## Required Gear

- **Headlamp:** Lightweight, long-lasting, preferably water proof.
- **Flashlight**
- **Rechargeable batteries and RECHARGER** or enough batteries for length of program: Bring enough for all of your electronic devices.
- **Waterproof wristwatch.**
- **Bring your university student ID with you to Panamá**

## Required Items for the Dormitory

- **Set of long twin sheets** and two bath towels. A small blanket (ex: fleece) is recommended if you get cold. Pillow will be provided. Many students tend to leave old sheets and towels after the program ends. Some of these remain at the Center or they are donated to local families.
- You should bring **extra towels for boat trips and for the beach**. The fast-dry microfiber towels are ideal (ex. 'Waves' micro towels, [www.wavesgear.com](http://www.wavesgear.com))
- **A stuff bag for dirty laundry.**
- **Travel alarm clock**

**Note:** The door to each student room is draped with a magnetic mosquito net. Though your rooms are well protected from mosquitos, many students find that with the door to the room opening and closing often throughout the day, some insects will enter. To protect yourself at night from mosquitos or other biting insects, the center can provide mosquito netting.

## Required Items for the Field and Classroom

- **Laptop computer.** Please see "Library and Computers" section of this guide. There are a limited number of computers at the site, so you will appreciate having an alternative when the Center computers are in high demand. **Note:** *SFS cannot accept responsibility for ensuring the safety of students' personal computers, either onsite or in the field. Personal laptop insurance coverage can often be obtained through the credit card used to buy the equipment (check with your credit card company), or through homeowners' insurance. Harsh weather can take a toll on all electronic equipment. A dry bag for such items is helpful. **Please bring a portable surge suppressor, carrying case, and security cable or lock to protect your laptop.***
- **Dry bag** (extra small or small) for your phone, money and identification
- **Notebooks** for 1 class
- **One waterproof notebook/journal**, pencils, or waterproof pens. Notes will get wet in the rainforest or out on the boat.
  - (Websites for waterproof materials: <http://www.kooters.com/fieldbook.html>, <http://www.riteintherain.com/>)
- **USB FLASH DRIVE** (consider bringing more than one, as they are relatively inexpensive and are vital for the program). Faculty provide readings and assignments on USB flash drives.
- **Daypack** (for field work and to carry your notebook and water). Again, **a drybag backpack is ideal**. You will be taking several day trips, so bring a sturdy water-resistant backpack of adequate size.
- **2 Water bottles of at least 1 liter each.** You will be carrying a water bottle most of the time.
- **Reusable shopping bag** for buying snacks etc in town.
- **Plastic or stainless steel container for food storage** (will be used on field trips and during DR)
- **Metal straw** (SFS has initiated the "Sin Carrizo Por Favor" campaign in town)

### **Required Snorkel and Water Gear:**

- **Snorkeling gear: mask, fins, snorkel, and dive socks or booties.** Please remember that you will be doing work out in the field. Mask and fin sets that are \$30 or less will not stand up to the work that is required of you. Investing in higher quality gear is recommended if you intend to pursue a marine-based Directed Research project. Importantly, please bring a mask that sits comfortably on your face and seals well, and make sure your fins are comfortable on your feet and won't give you blisters
- We require that you wear a **long-sleeved rash guard** on every snorkel. Wetsuits and rash guards provide a layer of protection against jellyfish, fire coral and other stinging marine organisms. **Bringing at least two will be helpful.**
- **Dry bag** (medium or large) to keep your items dry during boat rides, field work in the rain, etc. **(a dry bag backpack works wonders!)**

### **Optional Clothing, Equipment, and Personal Items**

- **Binoculars.** Ideal magnifications for field binoculars are 7 x 35 or 8 x 40 mm. Bushnell, Swift, Vivitar, and Nikon make good, reasonably-priced binoculars.
- **Camera** (Digital Cameras are recommended). Underwater cameras are highly recommended (ex. GoPro, Olympus T4, Sealife or other). If taking photos underwater, remember to purchase a floating wristband in case you drop it while snorkeling so that it is easier to find!
- **Things to do:** Personal journals, banagrams or travel games, music speakers, portable musical instruments and music books etc.
- **Books or reading device** (ex. Kindle) for pleasure reading to enjoy and share during free time.
- **Pocketknife.** Be sure to pack in checked luggage.
- **iPods or music players (phones).** Please bring some of your favorite music for individual or group listening and dancing.
- **Things to share:** hammocks, speakers, DVDs/movies, games, Frisbees, etc.
- **Small sewing kit**
- **Ziplock bags** - Bring a few for personal items. Students find them useful for a variety of reasons.
- **Umbrella**—small and packable-this is very important in the rainy tropics. These can also be purchased in Panamá.
- **Earplugs.** Very important if you are a light sleeper
- **Lonely Planet Panamá,** or some other guidebook
- **Spanish-English dictionary** (Optional, we have several in the SFS library)
- **Personal telephone calling card:** AT&T or Verizon or unlocked cell phone (buy SIM card and minutes in Panama) (Refer to the Communications section of this document for more information.)
- **Extra charger, personal surge protector.**
- **Favorite foods or snacks from home.**
- Solid waste disposal in Bocas is difficult. If you would like to reduce your waste while you are here, you can consider bringing: **a spork or a set of eating utensil to bring on fieldtrips, a reusable stainless steel straw and cloth napkins (you can easily wash them with your laundry).**

# Finances

In general, the best way to deal with money during your trip is to carry a combination of undamaged (i.e., crisp, clean, unwrinkled, unfrayed) cash (Panamá uses the US dollar).

- Bills (and coins) are not accepted by the banks if they are damaged in any way.
- You should bring at least US \$300 worth of cash with you to start. Small bills (\$20, \$10) are more widely accepted in Bocas. It is nearly impossible to receive change for bills larger than \$20 unless you are at a grocery store. It is also beneficial to bring \$1 bills (perhaps \$50 worth) to pay for taxis and souvenirs from small establishments.
- Businesses in Bocas **WILL NOT** accept traveler's checks and neither do the Bocas banks.
- There are two ATM's available in Town for foreign debit cards. However, as in the US, these are not 100% reliable-your ATM card needs to say "VISA" or "PLUS" to be able to withdraw money. If it is not one of these types, it will not work. Without an ATM card, there is no other way to extract money in Bocas. You cannot extract funds from your US bank account at Banco Nacional in Bocas del Toro without an ATM card. Cards from the US having new chip technology are now accepted in the ATMs in town.
- ATMs can run out of cash on weekends and during holidays, so plan accordingly!
- Please inform your bank and your credit card company that you will be traveling to Panamá before you depart the US and that you will be making transactions from this destination so that they do not place a hold on your account for suspicious activity.
- In addition, please check with your bank to make sure your ATM card will work internationally. (Note that occasionally if a phone line goes down, the Visa or Plus network may go down temporarily)
- There is a service charge for withdrawing cash and you should check with your bank to find out what the fee will be. The ATMs at Banco Nacional (the only bank in Bocas) charge \$5.25 per transaction. In addition, your bank may likely charge \$3-4 for this transaction for a total of \$8-10. Do not rely solely on your ATM or credit card to cover finances while in town. Other ATM machines are located in urban areas and the Tocumen airport, to which you will have only limited access (upon arrival and return).
- Personal checks are not accepted, even by banks.
- Visa is by far the most widely-accepted credit card. It is more difficult to find outlets that accept American Express and Discover. Almost none of the restaurants in town accept credit cards. In an emergency, you can ask the grocery store clerks to charge you extra on your card. They will give you the cash amount that you requested, however there is a fee of 10% of the amount you extract. You will probably use your credit or bank card mainly during the break. You should have at least one credit card with you in case of emergency or unexpected expenses, but **DO NOT** depend on credit cards for your regular spending money. If a visit to the doctor or hospital is necessary, please note that cash is only accepted in Bocas and the surrounding areas. You will not be able to use your credit card for most medical expenses.
- **We require that each student leave at least \$100 in the SFS safe at the Center for medical emergencies, in addition to paying a \$60 room deposit upon arrival (which will be refunded at the end of the semester).**

Again, a combination of cash plus credit card for emergencies and a **Visa or Plus** ATM card, is your best bet. There is a safe at the Center for you to store cash and other valuable items.

## Estimated Costs

Expenditure	Cost
Spending money	\$800-1100
Meals for non-program time	\$200-250
Excess baggage fees (round trip)	\$150
Money to purchase phone cards or minutes for a cell	\$30-100
Flight from Panama City, Panama to San Jose, CR ( <i>Combined program only</i> )	\$50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1180-1600+</b>

# Tips for Living and Studying Abroad

## Introduction

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Upon arrival to your SFS campus, all students participate in an orientation that provides information specific to the Center and country, including local community and culture, daily Center operations, and relevant risks and hazards. Prior to arrival on program, SFS recommends that students take time to understand the risks associated with travel in a foreign country as well as ways to increase their own personal safety. The following is a useful guide that provides information on best practices when traveling abroad.

## Country Information

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Visit government websites to learn country-specific information about your destination:

- Bureau of Consular Affairs: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- Overseas Security Advisory Council: [www.osac.gov](http://www.osac.gov)
- CIA World Fact Book: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html)

## Personal Safety

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Understand the potential health and safety hazards you could encounter while traveling. Consider that most incidents resulting in injury or death of students while participating in study abroad involve:

- Transportation and traffic accidents
- Use and abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Crime or theft
- Mental health issues
- Region-specific illnesses

## Situational Awareness

Be aware that travelers, especially those who have just arrived abroad, are often a likely target for petty theft or crime. Take steps to protect yourself by being aware of your surroundings.

- Travel in pairs or groups.
  - Avoid traveling alone or being out past local curfew.
  - In the event of confrontation, remain calm and focus on de-escalation and removing yourself from the situation.
- Keep belongings close to your body.
  - Consider leaving valuables or “flashy” jewelry at home or on campus.
  - If carrying valuables, make sure they are not visible or easily accessible in outer pockets of backpacks or purses.
- Be wary of undue attention or affection.
  - Be cautious about accepting food or drink from strangers. Where alcohol is served, keep an eye on your drink at all times and do not accept drinks that you did not see being opened in front of you.
  - Understand that the idea of consent varies between different countries and cultures. The current dialogue and understanding of the concept of consent in the US often does not apply in other cultures. Situational awareness and understanding of local cultures is an important factor in reducing risk in certain situations.
  - Protect yourself from sexually-transmitted diseases by using protection (e.g. condoms) or practicing abstinence. While it may be intriguing to start a relationship in a new country, consider the ramifications that a fleeting or short-term relationship may have within the local community.

- Avoid events that might be prone to civil disturbances, including protests, demonstrations, elections, and anniversaries of difficult events. If you see a protest forming, leave the scene. Even demonstrations meant to be peaceful can turn violent with little or no warning.
- Trust your instincts; if a place does not feel right, move to an alternative location as quickly and safely as possible. If that is not an option, find a secure area and shelter in place.

### **Local Laws and Cultural Norms**

Know the local laws to avoid putting yourself in a situation that could have been easily prevented. Behave maturely and in a way that is respectful of local cultural norms.

- Be aware that there might be country- or region-specific laws on alcohol consumption, smoking, behavior in public (e.g. public displays of affection, public intoxication, behavior at cultural sites, photography, etc.), carrying prescription medications, and many others.
- Wear clothing that is consistent with, and respectful of, local dress. Some monuments and places of worship may require certain parts of the body to be covered.
- Be aware that non-verbal communication (such as body language and hand gestures) considered harmless in the United States may be inappropriate or culturally insensitive to people in other countries.
- Be aware of local events or holidays where you are traveling, as some religious events or holidays require a heightened sense of cultural awareness or specific behaviors.

### **Food Safety**

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Water used for consumption and food preparation at SFS centers is filtered or boiled. Students are able to access potable drinking water at all times while on campus or on field trips. When off campus, students are encouraged to carry potable water from campus and consider safe drinking and eating practices. Remember:

- Water in many regions is often not potable, including ice, juices, and water for brushing teeth or showering. Be aware of how cups, plates, and utensils are cleaned or rinsed, as food or drink can be contaminated by utensils rinsed in non-potable water.
- If sampling street food, consider how it was prepared. Avoid raw or undercooked meat, fish, and shellfish or cooked food that has been allowed to stand for several hours at ambient temperature. Instead, eat food that has been cooked through and is still steaming hot.
- If consuming fruits or vegetables, select options that can be peeled or appropriately washed.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products, including cheeses.

### **Protection from Insects**

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When exposure to ticks or biting insects is a possibility, travelers should practice preventative measures:

- Take prophylactic medications where recommended
- Use a chemical-based insect repellent
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing
- Tuck pants into socks and wear closed-toe shoes and long-sleeve shirts
- Be aware of active times of day for insects in the region, and prepare accordingly
- Use a mosquito-net at night, if needed
- Check yourself for ticks, both during outdoor activity and at the end of the day

# Policies

By signing the SFS Terms and Regulations Contract, students agree that they have read, understand, and will abide by all SFS policies. Violation of any policy may result in disciplinary action.

**SFS Policies are in effect at all times throughout the full duration of Program Time, including downtime, rest days, and field trips.** The SFS Policies function under a set of Operational Objectives, which are common sense principles designed to support SFS centers and their students in functioning safely and successfully. The Operational Objectives include:

- Ensuring the well-being, health, and security of students and staff
- Providing high-quality academic programming
- Maintaining positive and cohesive local community relations
- Maintaining local and international standards necessary to successfully operate all Centers and SFS Headquarters

Students should consider the Operational Objectives at all times in order to prevent circumstances that may prevent them from successfully completing the program, disrupting the program experience of other students, or compromising the ability of SFS to operate. Such circumstances can include injury, preventable illness, reckless behavior, poor judgement, or acting in a way that harms community relations. Through pre-departure literature and program orientation, SFS works to empower students and requires them to manage their behavior in order to achieve the following objectives and aims:

- Taking responsibility for their own behavior
- Being aware of health, safety, and security risks present in the local area or specific to an activity
- Having good situational awareness
- Behaving maturely and in a way that is respectful of local cultural norms
- Knowing the country or region-specific laws
- Maintaining good individual and SFS relationships with the local community and other communities you may encounter

During Non-Program Time, which on certain programs may include designated breaks such as Weekends Away or Mid-Semester Break, certain SFS Policies are not in effect. While not under the full set of SFS policies, students are expected to observe the SFS Operational Objectives at all times.

## SFS-Wide Policies

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### *Alcohol Policy*

No possession or consumption of alcohol is permitted on SFS property including any SFS vehicles, common areas, student quarters, Center grounds, field trip sites, or during any program activities. Any use of alcohol that in any way compromises the Operational Objectives will be addressed and may include disciplinary action. The permissible drinking age is defined by the laws of the country that the Center is located in. Centers may have additional restrictions. Please check with the Student Affairs Manager or Center Director regarding pertinent local laws.

### *Drug Policy*

Use or possession of any drugs, chemical or medications that are illegal or interfere with the Operational Objectives of any SFS program or site, is prohibited. Illegal drugs are defined by United States and host-country laws. SFS reserves the right to interview, investigate, search for and confiscate any substances or paraphernalia in violation of this policy. SFS has a zero tolerance illegal drug policy – violation of this policy will result in expulsion. This policy is in force from the beginning to the end of the program, including Non-Program Time.

### ***Violence Policy***

There is no place for violence of any kind at SFS. Violence can be verbal as well as physical. Some examples include making threats, verbal intimidation, bullying, aggressive physical contact or behavior otherwise designed to frighten or intimidate. This list is not intended to be comprehensive. Violence of any sort will not be tolerated by SFS and may be grounds for immediate expulsion from the program. This policy is in force from the beginning to the end of the program, including Non-Program Time.

### ***Sign-Out Policy***

All students must sign themselves in and out of the Center so that they can be located in case of an emergency.

### ***Visitor Policy***

Aside from visiting professionals and guest lecturers, SFS does not allow visitors on site during the program because it is disruptive to the program schedule and the dynamics of the group. For security reasons, no local visitors are allowed on the Center property without prior consent from the Center Director. This policy increases students' and staff's safety, security, and sense of privacy.

### ***Local Laws Policy***

SFS supports and complies with all local laws. Students will be briefed on local laws and expectations soon after arriving at the Center. Any violation of a local law will result in SFS disciplinary procedures and in addition, may subject you to local penalties such as fines, arrest, or deportation. This policy is in force from the beginning to the end of the program, including Non-Program Time.

### ***Non-Program Time Policy***

During designated Non-Program Time, such as Weekends Away or Mid-Semester Break, students may have the opportunity to travel to other regions of the host country or neighboring countries. During this time, while not under the full set of SFS policies, students are expected to observe the SFS Operational Objectives at all times.

SFS does not provide students with recommendations for activities during Non-Program Time, but informs students about the inherent risks associated with travel and certain activities. Please note that students are responsible for their actions, judgement, safety and well-being during this time.

Prior to travel, students are expected to submit itineraries, including emergency contact information, mode of transportation, and accommodations. Travel to countries currently under a U.S. Department of State Travel Warning or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Warning Level Three are prohibited during the full duration of the program.

Additionally, the SFS Safety and Student Life Department may prohibit travel to regions with known or foreseeable political unrest, credible threat of terrorism, unstable weather patterns, or other factors of high risk upon review of student itineraries.

Non-Program Time dates are clearly established by SFS staff and travel must be done within this established time frame.

**Individual early departures or late returns will not be permissible.**

### ***Swimming Policy***

Swimming is always at your own risk. Where SFS maintains swimming pools or conducts recreational swimming during program time or on SFS property, protocols and guidelines will be presented. Recreational swimming is always optional and may be prohibited on certain programs or in certain regions due to local hazards or cultural practice. In Panama and the Turks and Caicos, where swimming is integral to the program, there will be a swim assessment and orientation to waterfront guidelines. In such cases, students must successfully complete a swim assessment, conducted by trained SFS staff, before participating in any other swim-related activities.

## ***Motor Vehicle/Boating Policy***

SFS students may not operate SFS motor vehicles or motor boats. SFS students may not ride in an SFS motor vehicle or motor boat without an SFS-approved operator. Students may not ride in non-SFS motor vehicles or motor boats without prior Center Director approval. Operating a motor vehicle, or operating or riding on a motorbike, motorcycle, moped, ATV, or motorized recreational watercraft, is prohibited for the full duration of the program, including Non-Program Time.

Seatbelts must be worn in all motor vehicles, where available. SFS Centers that utilize motor boats have additional Center-specific protocols including maximum occupancy, approved seating, personal flotation devices, radio protocols, rescue and first aid equipment in compliance with all local regulations.

## ***Sexual Harassment Policy***

It is the policy of SFS to respect the rights of students to work and study in an environment free from any type of sexual harassment and to investigate and resolve any reported cases of sexual harassment. Each administrator, faculty member and student is responsible for ensuring a work and learning environment free from sexual harassment.

SFS policy specifically prohibits any faculty or staff member from having a sexual relationship with a student at any time while the student is enrolled in an SFS program. In addition, no SFS employee shall threaten, promise, or insinuate, either explicitly or implicitly, that any student's refusal to submit to sexual advances will adversely affect the student's status with SFS, including but not limited to influence on grades or recommendations.

Moreover as a part of its overall nondiscrimination policy, SFS prohibits all forms of harassment of others because of race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual preference, national origin, physical or mental disability, or veteran status. In particular, an atmosphere of tension created by disparaging racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious remarks does not belong in the SFS workplace or learning environment and will not be tolerated.

## ***Campus-Specific Policies***

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The SFS Center in Panama has policies that are unique to the program, taking into consideration local environmental hazards and the local community and culture. Campus-specific policies may change at the discretion of SFS staff. Upon arrival to campus, students will be presented with a complete list of campus-specific policies; the following list is not exhaustive.

### ***Curfew***

Curfew is 10:00 pm on Sunday through Friday. Curfew is 11:00 pm on Friday and Saturday. Quiet hours begin at 10:00 pm every night.

### ***Buddy System***

Students are required to travel in groups of two or more whenever traveling outside of the Center, including exercise and travel into Bocas town.

### ***Swimming***

Students who wish to use the campus pool must complete the on-site swim test. Swimming is always at your own risk. Pool hours are 6:30 am to 8:00 pm. There is no diving or jumping into the pool or running on the pool deck. Students must use the buddy system while swimming. There is no swimming within 12 hours of having consumed alcohol.

### ***Kayaking and Stand-Up Paddle Boarding***

Kayaking or stand-up paddle boarding is always at your own risk. Waterfront hours are 6:30 am to 6:00 pm. Students who wish to kayak must wear a lifejacket at all times. Students who wish to stand-up paddle board must attach the least to one of their ankles at all times when in use. Students who have not passed the swim test are required to wear a lifejacket at all times while stand-up paddle boarding. Students are required to stay within the designated Waterfront Zones at all times and sign out / sign in on the Waterfront Whiteboard before and after each waterfront activity. Students must use the buddy system while kayaking or stand-up paddle boarding.

## Disciplinary Procedures

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Violations of any SFS-wide policies, Center-specific rules and protocols and Operational Objectives may result in one or more of the following disciplinary actions:

- Verbal warnings
- Written warnings
- Probation
- Expulsion

All staff and students are expected to understand and to actively support the standards of behavior as presented in our written materials and in our on-site orientations. While all staff are responsible for understanding and enforcing our standards for behavior, all formal disciplinary measures for students are at the discretion of the Center Director in consultation with his or her staff and Headquarters, where appropriate. Generally speaking, behavioral issues arising out of misunderstandings or that are not overly compromising to SFS Operational Objectives will be addressed with education, clarification and intermediate disciplinary measures (warnings/probation).

However, any behavior that significantly compromises the Operational Objectives or any violation of SFS policy may be cause for immediate expulsion. In the event of an offense at the level of Written Warning or above, SFS will contact the student's home institution. SFS also reserves the right to contact parents/guardians in the event of any behavior that potentially compromises the student's ability to participate in our program.

In the event that a student is asked to leave the program, SFS will return the student to the point of program departure at his or her own expense. At this time, any and all responsibility on the part of The School for Field Studies will cease. Students who are expelled or who depart early from the program will be withdrawn from all courses and receive no credit. All outstanding financial obligations to SFS remain in full effect.

# Insurance

## Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation Insurance

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All SFS students are automatically enrolled in the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan through American International Group, Inc. (AIG). This insurance is effective for the duration of the program and does not cover personal travel before or after the program.

Benefits of the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan include:

- \$350,000 for emergency medical evacuation
- \$100,000 for emergency security evacuation
- \$20,000 for repatriation of remains

The coverage provided by the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan is **NOT** the same as health, medical, or dental insurance. The plan covers the cost of transportation, accommodations, and medical care associated with an evacuation (e.g. life-saving support during transport in an air evacuation), in cases where the evacuation is deemed medically necessary. This insurance plan does not cover urgent or emergency medical care, basic medical care, laboratory tests, or pharmacy needs. **Therefore, students on SFS programs are required to supply their own health insurance, valid in the country or countries in which the program operates, for the full duration of their SFS program.**

## Health Insurance

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Students on SFS programs are required to supply their own health insurance, valid in the country or countries in which the program operates, for the full duration of their SFS program. Students are not allowed to join an SFS program without identifying such coverage.

Students looking to obtain health insurance should keep in mind the following:

- Most domestic health insurance plans do not cover out-of-country medical expenses. Students should check with their policy provider on what services are available out-of-country.
- Students should check to see if their home institution provides or offers international health insurance.
- Most insurance companies provide international coverage on a reimbursable basis, as most foreign public or private medical care facilities do not accept insurance for payment. Therefore, **students need to carry cash and/or a high-limit credit card to pay for medical expenses up front**, and then request reimbursement when they return home.

In the event that a student requires medical attention during a program, a staff member will accompany him or her on the visit(s) to a medical care facility. Students are liable for all incidental expenses, including medical costs, transportation, accommodations, etc., incurred by all parties involved during these visits. Students must pay in full for these expenses prior to departure from the program.

## Personal Property Insurance

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SFS does not provide insurance for personal property of students, staff, and visitors.

## Travel Insurance

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SFS does not provide travel insurance or reimbursement for trip cancellation. Students can look into options for travel insurance through their personal travel agent or through Advantage Travel.

# Health and Safety

## Introduction

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Every region has its own unique health challenges. Statistically, the most common injuries sustained by students on SFS programs are recreational in nature and the most common medical problem is traveler's diarrhea. However, international traveling and living presents potentially significant health and safety risks and challenges.

## 24-Hour Emergency Hotline

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If a parent or guardian needs to urgently contact a student in the field, an emergency call can be made to the **SFS 24-hour Emergency Hotline: 978-741-3544**. After dialing, press "2" when prompted to leave an emergency message and to receive a call back from the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. For non-emergency inquiries while a student is in the field, a message can be sent to [safety@fieldstudies.org](mailto:safety@fieldstudies.org).

## Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications

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Students should bring enough prescription and/or over-the-counter (OTC) medication to last the entire duration of the program. This also applies to any personal travel that may be done before or after the program.

If you are having difficulty procuring the full amount of medication, please alert the SFS Safety and Student Life Department immediately, as most medications cannot be replaced or refilled once in country, including common OTC medications. It is important to note that it is illegal to send medications through the mail and this will result in confiscation, criminal charges, or deportation.

While traveling, keep all medications in their original container to avoid issues through border control and customs. Note all medication on the SFS Online Medical Review Form and please alert the Safety and Student Life Department to any changes, including dosage. It is highly recommended that students do not discontinue or alter the dose of certain prescription medications before or during the program. Please consult with your prescribing physician and the Safety and Student Life Department with any questions.

## Dietary Requirements

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If you have a medically-necessary dietary requirement, you must contact the SFS Safety and Student Life Department within one week of acceptance. All dietary restrictions or preferences (e.g. gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan, etc.) should be noted on the SFS Online Medical Review Form and discussed with either your Admissions Counselor or the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. SFS is able to accommodate most dietary needs, but variety of food may be limited due to local availability, cultural practice, and cost.

## Accommodating Students with Disabilities

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Students requesting physical and health accommodations should contact the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. Students requesting learning accommodations should contact the SFS Office of Academic Affairs. SFS will work with students, home institutions, and physicians to determine the required level of accommodation and whether or not it can be safely and reasonably maintained on program. While SFS strives to make accommodations for most disabilities, due to the remote nature of the programs, there are varying levels of accessibility, services, and accommodations at each SFS center.

## Physical Conditioning

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Field work by its very nature is physically arduous: the days are long, the traveling seldom comfortable, and creature comforts generally lacking. The program involves a few fairly strenuous hikes as part of the academic program, so physical conditioning is strongly advised. In order to withstand the pace and rigors of the program as well as any "foreign" health risks of the country, it is strongly advised that you be in good physical health. Due to the humidity and temperatures, SFS has noted that chronic health problems often flare up, even if they are under control in the U.S. You should discuss such conditions seriously with your physician and SFS Admissions or the SFS Safety and Student Life Department to see if this SFS program will be right for you.

## Existing Medical Conditions

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Students must note any current or past medical conditions on the SFS Online Medical Review Form. If you have any medical conditions that could lead to sudden illness, such as allergies to foods or insect stings, asthma, chronic heart conditions, diabetes, epilepsy, or others, you must inform the SFS Safety and Student Life Department.

If you carry any critical medications (e.g. Epi-Pens, inhalers, glucagon, etc.), you must carry them with you at all times while on program.

If you have asthma, even if you have not had any issues in recent years, it is strongly recommended to bring an inhaler on program. Past students have found that their asthma can be triggered by environmental conditions (e.g. humidity, heat, dust, elevation, allergies, etc.) of certain program locations. Keep in mind, you may be exposed to allergens or environmental conditions you have not been exposed to in the past.

If you have a severe allergy or a family history of severe allergies, even if the reaction has been minor in the past, it is strongly recommended to bring two or more Epi-Pens with you on program. Due to the remote nature of the program, access to medical care can be delayed. In addition, you may be exposed to allergens that you have not been exposed to in the past, as well as the possibility of repeat exposures. Please contact the Safety and Student Life Department with any questions or concerns.

**Be certain to take care of any existing medical issues before arriving in country.** Due to the remote nature of the program, medical care is not always easily accessible. You may be responsible for all costs acquired to reach advanced medical care for treatment of pre-existing or non-emergency issues, including transportation and accommodations for yourself and an accompanying staff member.

## Medical Care in Panama

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Each SFS Center has a Student Affairs Manager (SAM) who is responsible for risk management, health, and safety on program. SAMs are certified Wilderness First Responders (WFR) and can provide initial first aid in the event of an illness or injury. If further medical care is needed, SFS staff will accompany the student(s) to the nearest and best available medical care facility. In the event of an emergency or hospitalization, SFS will contact appropriate emergency contacts as necessary.

The SFS Center in Panama is located approximately 15 minutes away from a medical clinic in Bocas del Toro. The clinic is staffed by a physician and has laboratory and pharmacy services. There is also a privately-owned pharmacy in town. For more advanced medical care, students would be taken to the cities of Changuinola, David, or Panama City, which have larger and more equipped medical facilities capable of handling more serious and complex medical cases.

Keep in mind that most insurance companies provide international coverage on a reimbursable basis, as most foreign public or private medical care facilities do not accept insurance for payment. Therefore, **students need to carry cash and/or a high-limit credit card to pay for medical expenses up front**, and then request reimbursement when they return home.

There are some medical emergencies or conditions that may necessitate medical withdrawal from the program, including injuries and illnesses such as infectious mononucleosis, malaria, or orthopedic injuries that result in reduced mobility. Final decisions on medical withdrawal are made by SFS in conjunction with the treating physician.

## Disease in Panama

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SFS requires that all students consult with a travel medicine clinic or physician who can look at the personal travel itinerary and medical history to develop a health strategy for travel, including appropriate vaccinations, medications, etc.

To locate a nearby travel medicine clinic, ask the Study Abroad Office at your university for recommendations. Your university may provide these services on campus. Alternatively, you can look up nearby travel medicine clinics on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).

## CDC-Recommended Vaccinations for Travelers to Panama

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For a list of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended vaccinations, visit the CDC website at: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). **Be sure to schedule your appointment at least six weeks prior to departure, as some vaccinations require a series of doses over a specific time frame.**

**Hepatitis A** is a viral infection of the liver that results in jaundice and severe malaise. It is rarely fatal, but disease can be protracted, and infected persons can be ill for six weeks or more. The disease is transmitted through ingestion of food or water that is contaminated by infected fecal matter, even in microscopic amounts. Symptoms occur two to six weeks after first exposure to the virus. There are now two vaccines licensed in the United States that are extremely effective in preventing hepatitis A infection, and that are quite safe to administer. Both vaccines require two doses (the booster dose is given six to nine months after the initial dose). The initial dose, however, is effective in providing protection. The CDC recommends that all travelers to Panamá receive this vaccine.

**Hepatitis B** is a contagious virus that is transmitted through blood, blood products, and other body fluids (such as semen). Symptoms include a sudden fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, dark urine, joint pain, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). Symptoms may last from several weeks to several months, or can develop into chronic hepatitis B with increased chance of liver disease and liver cancer. Travelers can become infected through unprotected sex with an infected person, injection drug use, transfusions with unscreened blood, and contaminated needles, so the CDC recommends this vaccine for travelers who might have sex with a new partner, get a tattoo or piercing, or have any medical procedures. Please keep in mind, medical procedures could be necessary due to unforeseen accidents or illness.

**Typhoid fever** is a serious disease caused by bacteria in contaminated food and water. Symptoms of typhoid include lasting high fevers, weakness, stomach pains, headache, and loss of appetite. Some patients have constipation, and some have a rash. Internal bleeding and death can occur but are rare. The CDC recommends that all travelers to Panamá get this vaccination.

**Malaria** is a disease that is transmitted by mosquitos. Symptoms usually appear within in 7 to 30 days but can take up to one year to develop and include high fevers, shaking chills, and flu-like illness. Malaria can cause severe illness and can be life threatening if left untreated. Prevention includes prophylactic medication, minimizing exposed skin (long-sleeved shirts and pants) especially between dusk and dawn when the mosquitos are most active, and applying insect repellent containing DEET. The CDC recognizes that most malaria transmission in Panama occurs in provinces east of the Panama Canal and toward the border with Colombia. While cases of malaria in the region in which we operate have been very rare, they do occur. Consult with a travel doctor about the advisability for malaria prophylaxis for travels to Panama, including any travel you may do before or after the program or during Weekends Away and Mid-Semester Break.

**Yellow Fever** is not present in Panama, but the government does require proof of yellow fever vaccination if you are arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever. This does not include the US. If you are traveling from a country other than the US, check the CDC website to see if you may be required to get the yellow fever vaccine. Also, if you have spent longer than 12 hours in an airport in a yellow fever risk area, you may need a vaccine.

*The recommendations enumerated above are specific for Panama. If you are planning to travel outside the country, the health risks may be different, and you should consult with your travel medicine specialist as to what additional measures may be required.*

## Non-Vaccine Preventable Disease in Panama

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There are a number of non-vaccine preventable insect-borne diseases found in Panama and protective measures are recommended.

**Dengue** is a viral infection that can cause a very severe flu-like illness. Subsequent exposures can cause symptoms to increase in severity. While rare, severe cases of dengue can be fatal. The disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is becoming increasingly common in many tropical countries. There is no vaccine against dengue available. Preventative measures include chemical-based mosquito repellent and protective clothing (e.g. lightweight, loose-fitting, long sleeves and pants).

**Chagas** is a parasitic infection that is transmitted through the feces of Triatomine bugs (aka “kissing bugs”). Symptoms can be mild or asymptomatic when first infected. However, the parasite causes long term damage to the heart muscle. Up to 30 percent of infected persons develop chronic infections that lead to serious cardiac or gastrointestinal diseases. Prevention includes keeping hygienic housing conditions.

**Chikungunya** is a viral infection transmitted by mosquitos and recently detected in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Symptoms most commonly include high fever and joint pain. The virus is transmitted by the same mosquito that carries dengue (active during the daytime), so preventative measures are the same: chemical-based mosquito repellent and protective clothing (e.g. lightweight, loose-fitting, long sleeves and pants).

**Zika Virus** is a mild viral infection that causes flu-like symptoms, including fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The primary concern for Zika virus, as stated by the CDC, is for women who are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant. In rarer cases, incidents of Guillain-Barre syndrome and other neurological disorders have been reported. The virus is transmitted by the same mosquito that carries dengue (active during the daytime), so preventative measures are the same: chemical-based mosquito repellent and protective clothing (e.g. lightweight, loose-fitting, long sleeves and pants).

**Leishmaniasis** is a flesh-eating parasite that is transmitted by sand flies. Symptoms include skin sores that become large scabs or ulcers over time. Because sand flies in Panama are increasingly resistant to chemical repellents, such as DEET and permethrin, prevention includes minimizing exposed skin (long-sleeved shirts and pants) between dusk and dawn, when the sand flies are most active.

**Diarrhea** is the most common ailment that students encounter. Diarrhea can be caused by a number of different factors, including 1) the process of acclimating to a new environment or new foods, 2) stress or other emotional challenges, 3) use of certain medications, and 4) infections caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Shortly after arriving in country, students participate in an orientation that explains the importance of diligent hand washing, personal hygiene, kitchen hygiene, careful food handling, and water purification. These are important preventative measures that all students are expected to closely follow throughout the full duration of the program. Students who do experience diarrhea are encouraged to inform the Student Affairs Manager or other SFS staff member so that they may receive the proper treatment, which may include oral rehydration, a bland diet, and potentially a visit to the local medical clinic for diagnostics and medication, if necessary. Prior to coming on program, some students are prescribed an antibiotic for “traveler’s diarrhea” by a home physician or travel clinic. If this is the case, it is highly recommended to consult with the Student Affairs Manager at the onset of diarrhea, prior to starting this medication. Overuse or improper dosage, attempting treatment for a non-bacterial or non-parasitic cause of diarrhea, or failure to properly complete treatment could result in a persistent or worsening condition.

## Other Hazards in Panama

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Some of the hazards associated with this SFS program, field work and living in Panama are described below. While SFS has tried to anticipate as many risks as possible, you may nonetheless encounter risks that are not described below.

**Heat/Humidity:** Dehydration occurs easily in hot environments. A conscious effort should be made to replace fluids lost through evaporation, which can be as much as two quarts an hour when physically active.

**Swimming:** Drownings do occur in Panama. Many beaches, including in the Bocas del Toro archipelago, are notorious for rip tides, particularly at Red Frog and Bluff beaches where during certain times of the year, swimming is not feasible. Recreational swimming is always optional and may be prohibited on certain programs or in certain regions due to local hazards or cultural practice. (Please see Swimming Policy).

**Earthquakes:** There have been several earthquakes in recent years in Panama. These natural disturbances are unpredictable. Earthquake awareness and response are covered during program orientation.

**Snakes:** Panama has many species of venomous snakes. Students are required to wear close-toed shoes after dusk and during field excursions. Upon arrival, students are provided with an orientation on snake precautions. At no time are students to handle snakes.

**Africanized Bees:** Some bees in Panama are Africanized and can be aggressive when disturbed. You should be aware of this risk, particularly when you leave defined trails. If you think a beehive is near you, you should leave the area quickly. Students will be educated on Africanized bees during program orientation. Students who are allergic to bee stings should carry epinephrine with them at all times.

**Dogs:** Dogs can be aggressive and territorial and it is advisable to avoid dogs or approach them with great caution.

**Motor Vehicle Accidents:** Driving on Panamanian roads is more hazardous than driving in the US, especially at night or during periods of heavy rains. It is also important as a pedestrian to have a heightened awareness of traffic. Do not assume pedestrians have the right-of-way. It is important to utilize only reputable and verified modes of transportation. At no time are students allowed to operate an automobile, boat, motorcycle, scooter, personal water craft (e.g. Jet Ski) or other motorized vehicle. Students are not permitted to be passengers on motorcycles, motorbikes, scooters, or personal water craft at any time, including Weekends Away and Mid-Semester Break.

**Assault:** Assaults of tourists in Panama City, Bocas del Toro, and other parts of Panama do occur. Students are advised to travel in pairs, dress according to local cultural standards, carry as little cash as possible, and have strong situational awareness.

*Please note this list is not exhaustive or complete. If you plan to travel to other areas, either inside or outside of Panama, the health and safety risks may be different, and you should educate yourself and consult with your travel medicine specialist as to what additional measures may be required.*

# Cultural Adjustment

## Defining Cultural Adjustment

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Cultural adjustment is the process of adjusting to a different cultural context. It is the process of filtering through initially identifiable differences in customs, language, eating style, and more to discover the underlying values and assumptions that are the foundation of a certain way of life. Whether you are from the United States or from another country, encountering another way of life may entail questioning your own basic values and beliefs. Cultural adjustment may beg of you to ask the question, “Who am I?” By asking such a fundamental question and working through the answers, you can build a strong sense of self, gain more confidence in who you are, learn to identify at a basic level with people from any background, and become more accepting of others. At this point, you will have begun to develop a sense of global citizenship.

Think about how you are feeling now as you prepare to go abroad with an SFS program. Are you feeling excited? Nervous? Overwhelmed? Ready?

Now, think about how you might feel when you first arrive in your host country. Will you feel exhilarated? Overwhelmed by the newness of it all? Jet-lagged? Perhaps frustrated or humbled by the reality that you are unable to communicate as well as you are accustomed?

How will your emotions and thoughts change with time after the initial excitement of arrival? Will you be amazed and/or frustrated by the differences between how things are done at home and how things are done at your new home abroad? Confronted with these differences, will you question values you held and always thought to be “right”? Will you grow in depth of thought and sense of self?

It may seem like a very long time from now, but imagine returning home after study abroad. How do you hope you have changed as a result of your time abroad? How will others see your new personal, cultural, social, and academic developments? Will it be easy to reconnect with family, friends, and your community? Will it take effort? How will you communicate your experiences and developments and help loved ones take part in an important period of your life?

Experiencing some difficulty adjusting to your new environment is normal and even important for personal development. The flow of emotions and experiences above describes the cultural adjustment process that many students move through before, during, and after their study abroad terms.

## Cycling through Cultural Adjustment: The “W” Curve



Based on Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn & Gallahorn (1963)

The model above puts into visual format the process of cultural adjustment previously described.

**Arrival:** Upon arrival, many students are exhilarated by the myriad of new sights, sounds, and smells of their host country. You may feel physically exhausted from the travel, and you may need to give your body time and care to help it adjust to the different weather, geographic conditions, food, and time schedule. During this initial period, you may experience a variety of heightened emotions.

**Culture Shock:** After the initial excitement period, you may begin to notice the many differences between your home and your new home abroad. Processing these differences may be difficult, and many students report emotions of anxiety, stress, confusion, homesickness, discouragement, hostility toward the local culture and customs, and even depression. You may experience physical symptoms such as colds, headaches, or stomach upsets. On the other hand, some students experience very little culture shock.

**Recovery:** With effort and time, you will get your legs back under you again. You may wish to employ some of the coping strategies listed in the next section, or find your own way to regain and rethink equilibrium.

**Adaptation:** At this stage, students have renegotiated belief systems and “the way things are done.” You may feel at home in your residence abroad.

**Returning Home:** Some students find that just when they have become comfortable with their surroundings abroad, it is time to return home! Because you are traveling back to a familiar place, you may not expect to experience reverse culture shock, which mirrors the culture shock process. Many students experience re-entry culture shock more severely than they do culture shock. The best way to smooth the reverse culture shock process is to prepare for it before, during, *and* after your time abroad. Make sure to share your experiences and personal development with family and friends so that they can take part in your growth. Continuous communication in a spirit of sharing (rather than expecting or needing others to understand) will greatly smooth the reentry process.

## New Experiences, New Ways of Thinking

Perhaps this is your first time visiting a foreign country for an extended period. By removing yourself from the US or your country of origin and being confronted with difference, you may gain a greater awareness of what it means to be from your home country.

In part because of the US' prominent media and political and economic presence, you may find that people around the world have formed viewpoints, even stereotypes about Americans. Stereotypes are not always accurate, and they do not apply to every person within a culture. Be aware of the possible negative impact of stereotyping, both for yourself and also in how you may be viewed. Be open to and appreciative of the great differences between individuals within a population.

## A Note to Women and Diverse Students

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What it means to identify as LGBTQIA+, a woman, a person of color, a member of a certain religious group, a participant with a disability, etc. may be very different in your host country than at home. For example, a gay student may find that the host community is much less accepting of homosexuality than his university community. Students who are accustomed to being part of the majority group at home (e.g. Caucasian students) may need to readjust to living as a minority abroad. The change may be for better or for worse, but you might not be treated or viewed in the way that you are accustomed to at home.

Please use the resources available on the Diversity & Inclusion page of our website ([www.fieldstudies.org/about/diversity-inclusion](http://www.fieldstudies.org/about/diversity-inclusion)) to inform yourself as you prepare for your abroad experience.

## Coping With Cultural Adjustment

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What are some tricks for coping with and growing through the cultural adjustment process?

- Keep a journal. Write about the experiences, emotions, and thoughts that you have.
- Take care of your physical body. Be sure to get sufficient exercise, and take care of your body's nutritional needs. Get enough rest and sleep.
- Communicate. If you are feeling particularly down, approach a friend, staff member, or mentor. Sometimes just talking about difficulties you are facing makes the burden seem lighter. Many of the people surrounding you at the Center have experienced or are experiencing the same cultural adjustment process as you. There is strength and growth in sharing.
- Step out of your comfort zone. When everything around us is new, we sometimes just want to withdraw. Practice your language skills with community members. Try delicious foods you had never heard of before. Take advantage of your abroad experience, because you will not have the same exact opportunity again!

The above are just a few small examples of strategies for facing cultural adjustment. There is a multitude of ways that individuals process and adjust, and you may discover other strategies that work particularly well for you.

**Everyone at The School for Field Studies extends a warm welcome to you and looks forward to seeing you in the field!**