



THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# COSTA RICA

## Center for Sustainable Development Studies

**Student Field Preparation Guide**

Semester Programs 2018-2019

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.**

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**Dear Student:**

I would like to welcome you on behalf of the faculty and staff of The School for Field Studies, Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Sostenible (Center for Sustainable Development Studies) in Atenas, Costa Rica.

We are all looking forward to meeting you. The Center for Sustainable Development Studies has a long tradition of implementing experiential learning through the combination of academics, outreach, and research projects aimed at solving applied environmental and conservation issues faced by people in Costa Rica. We are immersed in one of the most biodiversity-rich countries, now exposed to brand-new challenges, such as climate change, increased tourism, urban sprawl, lack of urban planning, increased demand for potable water, inappropriate waste disposal, and conflicts between protected areas and human communities.

My name is Gerardo Avalos, and I am the Center Director. I am a native Costa Rican, and did my undergraduate studies at the University of Costa Rica (BSc in Biology), but have been teaching almost continuously for North American students ever since I graduated from college. After completing my BSc, I went to the University of Colorado in Boulder to start my PhD. Then I transferred and graduated with an MSc and a PhD from the University of Missouri. I am a plant physiological ecologist with strong interests in conservation. For the last 6 years, I have been combining my position as Center Director at SFS Costa Rica with my job at the University of Costa Rica as professor of Ecology.

I am very excited that you decided to join us this coming semester to share the wonders and challenges of studying tropical nature. Our program in this respect is unique because of the multidisciplinary approach taken to analyze the interactions between human conflicts in the use of natural resources, the generation of scientific knowledge on tropical organisms and ecosystems applied to biodiversity protection and the management of natural resources, and the social and political pressures for defining conservation policies. Balancing all this is what makes sustainable development not only interesting, but critical for our survival as a species.

My role as Center Director is not only to facilitate your academic experience, but to transform it into a life-changing experience, impacting your life in positive directions, as well as to facilitate, by doing so, your professional fulfillment as well as that of our faculty and staff. We are always excited to meet and get to know the new group of students, and feel very much the anticipation of experiencing once more the development of the personal growth of everyone, students, faculty and staff. Throughout the process, our research will generate sustainable management alternatives for different clients in Costa Rica (national parks, local communities and schools, farmers, development associations, and NGOs).

Soon after your arrival to the SFS Center you will meet the rest of our faculty and staff, including professors, student affairs manager, interns, site manager, cooks, the campus care takers, and the rest of the Atenas community. The program in which you are about to participate is not a conventional college experience. It involves hands-on academics, and is centered on creating a positive, sustainable community here at the Center, in the town of Atenas, and throughout all the areas of Costa Rica that we visit. Our goal is to transfer this knowledge and experience to you so that you could multiply the vision of the multidisciplinary approach to sustainable development solutions in your own community. We all anticipate a wonderful and eye-opening experience.

You should arrive in Costa Rica with an open mind and be ready to face the challenges brought on by living in a developing country, with limited resources and facilities and while interacting with a community composed by your classmates and the staff at the Center, sometimes with little privacy, limited comforts and with spotty internet and access to social networks (be ready to unplug). You will be immersed in a tropical climate, exposed to the Spanish language, and asked to understand a different culture, all within the demands of a vigorous schedule and academics that may challenge you in ways you may not have been challenged before. Throughout this process, we hope you will develop as a human being with clearer goals in terms of your role as an agent of change for a more sustainable society.

We all look forward to meeting you soon!

**Dr. Gerardo Avalos, PhD, Center Director**

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# Introduction

This Student Field Preparation Guide is an important tool which includes information you need to know to prepare for your international education experience! Use it from the time you are accepted to the program, to when you are getting ready to leave, to while you are in the field and even after you return home.

We begin with a reminder list of the vital tasks you need to accomplish, including what you need to send to SFS and when. 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 information about the particular country and Center where you will be studying. Along with some background on these places, we have included a packing list and some suggestions concerning finances to help guide you in planning what to bring with you. There is also information about what life is like at your Centre on a day-to-day basis and what to expect with regard to living conditions. Finally, we have included some resources on safety and traveling abroad.

**Please be sure to 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 what 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)

If you have questions about items on your online checklist or cannot access it, please contact admissions.

**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:**

Non-refundable Program Commitment Deposit of \$500. 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 Fall Programs:** June 15<sup>th</sup>

**SFS Spring Programs:** November 15<sup>th</sup>

- **SFS Terms and Regulations Contract.** Submitted electronically through your SFS online account.
- **Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks Form.** Submitted electronically through your SFS online account.
- **FERPA Notice and Consent.** Submitted electronically through your SFS online account.
- **Passport number and expiration date.** This must be entered electronically through your SFS online account at [www.fieldstudies.org](http://www.fieldstudies.org). **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. Through your My SFS 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.

**SFS Fall Programs:** June 1<sup>st</sup>

**SFS Spring Programs:** October 30<sup>th</sup>

***Other Preparation To Do's:***

- **Contact SFS alumni** on campus or as provided by SFS to learn more about what to expect.
- Obtain **passport**/Check to make sure your passport is valid.
- Obtain **visa** for entry into country if necessary. See Passport and Visa section of this Field Guide for more information.

- If you are a permanent resident of the U.S. (NOT a U.S. Citizen) 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**.
- Make sure your bank/credit card companies know you will be **using your cards abroad**. In order to receive medical attention, a credit or debit card with a limit of at least \$1,000 is required.
- **Obtain required clothing and equipment** (see packing list later in this document).
- **Make travel arrangements** that meet the schedule outlined by the group flight departure and arrival times. (If traveling independently, have itinerary approved by, and submitted to, SFS).
- **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.
  - Your **prescriptions and over-the-counter medications**. Prescription medications should be in their original 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 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 Participations 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 places where you're going.
- **Configure your laptop** to access your home school's online libraries and e-journals before you arrive in the field (see Library and Computers 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 plane ticket and your passport**. Take one copy of each with you and leave one copy with a friend or family member.

### **Optional**

- **Obtain personal property insurance** (e.g. for your laptop computer) if you so desire; SFS does not provide this.
- **Purchase travel/course cancellation insurance if you wish**. You may want to check with your home university if you are unable to locate a provider on your own. This is different from evacuation and repatriation insurance, which is provided by SFS.

## **Travel Arrangements**

You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements and for paying your travel to and from the program. You have a few choices: you may wish to book your ticket online, through your local travel agent, or by working with Advantage Travel Agency, which is the SFS travel agency of choice.

## Advantage Travel

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SFS does not offer a group flight for this program, but we do encourage you to book your flights through our travel agent, Advantage Travel. You are not required to book with Advantage, nor is it guaranteed to be the cheapest offering available. However, there are a number of benefits to booking with Advantage, 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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**You will receive your specific travel instructions and contact information for Advantage Travel about 3-4 months prior to the start of your SFS program** – do not try to make arrangements before receiving these instructions. Please follow these instructions carefully and reach out to your Admissions Counselor with questions.

**SFS will designate a group meeting time and date at Juan Santamaría International Airport in San Jose (SJO).** Field Staff will meet the group at the airport at the designated pick up time and coordinate transportation to the Center. If you experience travel delays, SFS will coordinate with you to arrange an alternate pick up schedule.

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.

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 semester with the School for Field Studies more sustainable, we ask you to consider a carbon offset for your flights to and from Costa Rica. Offsets can be purchased through FONAFIFO, Costa Rica's national forestry financing fund, ensuring that trees will be planted in Costa Rica. Visit <http://www.fonafifo.com> for more details about making your travel carbon-neutral.

## Proof of Departure before 90 Days

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Costa Rican Immigration Law requires all visitors to present proof of departure within the 90 days permitted with a standard tourist visa. Before departure, your SFS admissions counselor will also provide you with a copy of your bus ticket for the international trip that takes place during the program. Students must have with them a copy of their return flight and a copy of their bus ticket for the international trip; airline and airport personnel at your home airport will not let you on the plane without a copy of this information.

## 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 Costa Rica, US citizens are ordinarily given a 90 day tourist visit. Non-US citizens may 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 or plan to stay in Costa Rica for longer than the program lasts, please check with the Embassy of Costa Rica: [www.costarica-embassy.org/?q=node/72#2](http://www.costarica-embassy.org/?q=node/72#2) . If you are not a US citizen and need to obtain a consular visa, please check with the Costa Rican Embassy.

**IMPORTANT:** If you are traveling from a country other than the United States, are planning to visit another country prior to the program, or have recently travelled internationally, please reference, “Health and Safety in Costa Rica” regarding the yellow fever vaccination. **The Costa Rican government requires proof of yellow fever vaccination if you are arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever.** If you are traveling from a country other than the US, check the CDC website to see if you will 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 Program travels to the Republic of Panama for a week-long field trip and information about documentation during this excursion will be sent to you by your Admissions Counselor after acceptance. Current requisites to enter Panama include a valid passport (with 6 months or more before expiring), proof of financial capacity to be in the country (recent copy of a bank statement showing \$500 or more), and ticket out of the country (provided by SFS).

### Arrival at the Airport in Costa Rica

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**When you arrive in Costa Rica**, you will need to go through immigration and present your passport. If questioned, indicate to immigration officials that you are visiting Costa Rica as a tourist, since you do not have a student visa. Immigration officials will stamp your passport and write in a given number of days for which you are permitted to stay in Costa Rica – typically 90 days. You may be asked to provide proof that you will leave the country within 90 days. In this case you should show the departure bus ticket sent to you by your admissions counselor, but only if requested.

**It is extremely important that you confirm you have been given the correct amount of days (at the very least enough to last until the departure day for the mid-semester excursion – at least 60 days), before walking away from the immigration agent.** If you have not been given enough days, you should call this to the attention of the immigration agent, as he/she may still be able to change the number of days written in.

**If for some reason you are given too few days**, you will have to go through the long, tedious, and expensive process of extending your tourist visa. This requires several trips to the immigration department in San Jose, which is difficult due to the structured nature of the program. You will also be held responsible for all associated costs, including the cost of having a staff member accompany you to the immigration department. For this reason it is extremely important that you follow the aforementioned instructions and make sure you have been given enough days on your visa to last until the mid-semester excursion.

**After you pick up your bags**, you should go through baggage customs and present your completed Customs Declaration Form (be sure to pick one up from your flight attendant during the flight!). Because you will not be leaving anything valuable behind in Costa Rica, **there is nothing to declare** (unless bringing in tobacco; SFS prohibits alcohol on site).

**If your bags do not arrive**, you must complete a lost baggage form at the airline desk after clearing customs. Ask that the bags be routed to the Center's address in Atenas:

Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Sostenible  
Tel 506.2446.5558  
Atenas-20501  
Costa Rica  
Central America

**Please be sure to put your name and the above Center address 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 some items in carry-on luggage in case bags get delayed. For example, include toothbrush, contacts/glasses, deodorant, change of underwear, etc. Please also make sure to pack the copies of your plane/bus tickets, prescription medications, cash, and any other valuables in your carry-on luggage!

***Where to Meet:***

**After you clear your luggage through customs**, a SFS representative will meet you at the assigned time outside the customs area (after exiting the building) to take you to the Center. You will receive more information about meet-up in the travel instructions for your program.

# About SFS Costa Rica

## Setting

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Costa Rica, the “rich coast,” was visited and named by Christopher Columbus in 1502. Comparable in size to West Virginia, Costa Rica is bordered by Panama and Nicaragua, as well as the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. There are approximately 4.8 million inhabitants, with 52 percent of the population living in the Central Valley, where San José, the capital city, is found. While approximately 26 percent of Costa Rica is protected in some form, a high rate of deforestation continues in the non-protected areas. This said, Ticos, as Costa Ricans call themselves, are addressing their country's environmental problems with great commitment and creativity. Costa Rica is also well known for abolishing the Army in 1948. Costa Ricans recently elected a female president, Laura Chinchilla (2010-2014), for the first time in their democratic history. The current president is Carlos Alvarado (2018-2022). The last elections took place in February 2018.

## Weather and Climate

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The weather at the Center is **hot and humid during the day and cooler and breezy at night year round**, with moderate temperatures and plenty of sun even in the rainy season. The altitude is 2,000 feet above sea level, with annual precipitation of 85 inches and an average year-round temperature of 80° F - coolest temperatures are about 60° F and highs reach about 90° F.

**Rainy Season** is May through November, **Dry Season** is December through April.

**Fall Semester** students should be prepared for rainy season conditions at the Center, including rain and sometimes thunderstorms in the afternoons and evenings.

**Spring Semester** students should expect warm/hot days and cool nights at the Center from February through mid-April, with potential drought conditions later in the semester.

As part of this program, we will travel both to higher elevations where it can get as cool as 40°F and damp at night and to the lowlands where it can be as warm as 100°F.

## Geography and Ecology

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Swift rivers, several of which have been harnessed to electric power plants, etch the sloped terrain. Magnificent beaches fringe both coasts, and some of the largest known nesting beaches for sea turtles are found here.

Costa Rica's rich botanical and faunal diversity is fostering the development of a significant tourism industry. Many Ticos support themselves through agriculture, especially the growing and harvesting of bananas, pineapple and coffee, but the service economy is taking a strong foothold, with almost 70 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Costa Rica has shifted from an agricultural economy to a services-based economy. Forests throughout the country show the impact of grazing cattle. Fishing industries include tuna and shrimp fishing on the Pacific coast and traditional lobster fishing on the Atlantic coast. Productive coral reefs are concentrated on the Atlantic coast. While agricultural production can be found on plantations and haciendas on both sides of the central mountain range, industrial development tends to concentrate heavily in the Central Valley.

## Costa Rican Social Systems

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Historically, Costa Rica has been a society of modest peasant farmers with a small number of Amerindian peoples and traditions. Despite its glamorous name, the “rich coast” never produced the kind of gold expected by the Spanish conquistadors. Instead, the predominantly rural Spanish colonizers, who favored the Pacific watershed highlands, had to settle for a modest subsistence as small-scale farmers. Until the rise of coffee farming, the country remained one of the poorest, most isolated regions on the isthmus.

Traditions common to peasant societies evolved, centering on family structure and primary relations networks. Strong informal economic exchange was based on subsistence agriculture, while social identity was determined by locality and region. Despite success in coffee growing and exportation, the developing state depended largely on foreign investment to create much-needed infrastructure. A prime example is the railroad to the Atlantic coast, which for many years would transport the bulk of coffee and bananas to be shipped to foreign markets. Thus, many public services and productive enterprises were initiated by the state.

Costa Ricans place strong emphasis on education as a basis for development. Today, the country has one of the highest literacy rates in the hemisphere, and expenditures on education constitute over 25 percent of the state budget (eight percent of the GDP). Institutional development proceeded under an enlightened perspective of social reform nurtured mostly by European thought. This led to the eventual abolition of the armed forces after the 1948 Revolution. Today, Costa Rica has a civilian police force and several small elite police units involved mostly in drug enforcement efforts.

Since the 1950s, Costa Rica has made a concerted effort to industrialize the economy. The result has been the rise of a class of technocrats and bureaucrats who now fill the ranks of government, industry, and higher education institutions. The 1980s were a politically and economically troublesome decade. During this period, the country's foreign debt rose to one of the highest per capita in the world. Indirect involvement in regional political and military struggles also offset some important social gains. In spite of this, the nation managed to retain and even affirm democratic institutions and basic social services. Despite worrisome indexes of rising malnutrition, population growth, pollution, and other issues, social well-being seems fairly stable.

Political stability and a relatively high standard of living have allowed Costa Rica to maintain a steady course of social progress and to become a social and political leader in the region. This earned former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias a Nobel Peace Prize in 1988, and the country a level of prestige which it had not previously enjoyed. Then, in 1994, Costa Rica announced to the world its adoption of Sustainable Development as an official policy (the current goal is to achieve carbon neutrality in 2021). Since then, the country has made impressive advances in the fields of biodiversity prospecting, protected area management and environmental regulation. Due to these policies, Costa Rica is recognized worldwide as a model for environmentalism. During the late 1990s, Costa Rica focused its attention on developing tourism as a way to diversify its economic model of development. This has distinguished the country in terms of foreign investment by eco-tourism enterprises and major tourist chains. In addition, larger high tech companies have established manufacturing units in the country.

## Program Overview

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The SFS Center for Sustainable Development Studies offers the opportunity to participate in an intensive program of academic study and field research focusing on the sustainable management of natural resources in a developing nation.

Our research direction and coursework emphasizes:

1. Biodiversity protection and natural resources and protected area management efforts
2. Development and promotion of environmentally friendly agricultural practices
3. Ecosystem health and visitor impact management plans for protected zones.

SFS is also committed to presenting social and economic issues that affect the protection of the natural resource base, support the community in light of ongoing economic and social transformation, and engage students in the debate over sustainable development in general using Costa Rica as case study.

You will visit different ecosystems while in the field, which may include lowland tropical rainforest, tropical cloud forest, the rainforest on the Pacific coast, dry forest on the Guanacaste region, communities surrounding national parks, agroecosystems, farms, volcanoes, mangroves and coastal ecosystems.

Our field excursions will give greater exposure to a variety of ecosystems and sustainable development projects. The semester program also visits Panama, offering a chance for comparison with topics learned in Costa Rica and for expanding your knowledge of the disparity in the management of natural resources in Central America under a different set of social, historical, economic and natural contexts.

The School for Field Studies Program in Costa Rica, like in other countries, is a highly structured and academically rigorous program. We also have a set of rules which allow us to keep our students as safe as possible and ensure good community relations. For many students, there is less independence than they have at their home university or would expect when studying abroad.

Students are also held to high standards in regards to our program's rules and policies, including curfew on weeknights and weekends and adhering to an alcohol free campus. All rules are explained in detail at the beginning of the program, and students should understand that exceptions to our rules and disciplinary procedures will not be made for extenuating circumstances.

## **Atenas and Barrio Los Angeles**

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The SFS Center for Sustainable Development Studies is located at the top of a hill overlooking the Rio Grande and the Central Valley of San Jose and is surrounded by small orange and mango orchards. Four rivers converge with the Rio Grande within a mile of the Center. There are patches of forest along the rivers. The immediate neighborhood surrounding the Center, called La Presa, includes about 200 people. CSDS is part of this community, and you will have opportunities to interact with local people through activities such as community projects, soccer games, volleyball, dances, and bingo games.

La Presa is part of the community of Barrio Los Angeles on the outskirts of the town of Atenas in the Central Valley. Atenas is in the province of Alajuela, west of San José, approximately 700 meters above sea level. The Canton of Atenas, the political subdivision where the town of Atenas is located, has over 27,000 people in an area of 9 square kilometers. This is considered a small town in Costa Rica. The area is hilly and has numerous rivers. The town of Atenas, located about 5 kilometers away from the Center, is relatively small but has a medical clinic, ambulance service, supermarkets, several restaurants, a couple of banks and ATM's, a post office, a marketplace, many stores, Internet cafés, and good public transportation to and from San Jose. Today Atenas, because of its location, has become a suburb for the greater metropolitan area.

Most people in the area are farmers with 1 to 10 hectare farms. Despite some steep slopes, the soil is relatively fertile and produces fruits (mangoes, oranges, lemons, avocados, and papayas), coffee, sugar cane, herbs, vegetables (green beans, coriander, celery, and peppers), basic grains (beans and corn), and fodder for cattle. In addition, over 100 hectares in the community have been reforested in the past three years. Many people belong to some sort of community organization. There are 18 Asociaciones de Desarrollo Comunal (ADC, or Community Development Associations), as well as several fruit grower associations. Agriculture over the past decade has been displaced by urbanization and housing. Most of the farmers that remain are engaged in coffee and maintain small farms.

Other important economic activities include crafts, family production of sweets (famous nationwide), small-scale agro-industries, and large poultry and egg farms, including one that has the country's most modern system of residual water treatment.

## Facilities

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The Center consists of two major buildings (the main house and the dormitory building), kitchen and dining facility, outdoor classroom, small pool, garden, and staff cabins (casitas). The center is set amidst orange and mango orchards. Although our population of farm animals is constantly in flux, there is a chicken coop with about 60 chickens, ducks, pigs, and a small organic garden project. In addition, the center has a soccer field where students are welcome to play soccer or volleyball during the day and also at night, as well as a basketball court.

The **main house** includes the staff offices and a study lounge.

The **dormitory building** includes dormitory rooms, shared bathrooms with cold-water showers (separated by gender), library, small computer room, lab area, indoor classroom (there is also an outdoor classroom), student lounge area (TV, stereo, HDMI cable to plug into laptops), and laundry facilities. The dormitory rooms each house up to four to six students and are furnished with bunk beds and individual work/shelving areas. Students receive individual room keys and lockers which should be used on a permanent basis to store valuables.

### Laundry:

The Center has two clothes washers, a dryer, and lines for sun drying. SFS does not supply laundry detergent but does supply dish soap for student use. Students can buy laundry detergent in town.-

The **kitchen/dining facility** is where everyone eats meals, posts announcements, and has occasional meetings.

While the program is on the road, staff and students will stay in biological stations, small hotels, cabins, or camp in tents; camping is infrequent, and occurs only during the dry season (Spring Semester) which runs from December to May. Fall Semester will not include camping.

## Electrical Appliances

Electricity in the dorm is the same voltage as in the USA. There is no need to bring a converter, although it may be helpful to bring adapters (to go from three-prong to two-prong cords – some outlets at the Center are three-prong and some are two-prong). We also recommend bringing a personal power strip, as there are a very limited number of outlets per dorm room.

## Research Equipment

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The Center has basic field laboratory equipment including simple sampling and measuring equipment for use in the field and classroom. The field sites are the true laboratories of SFS programs! GPS units are useful during the research time, although the Center does not have enough units for each student.

## Library and Computers

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There is a small resource room, or library, at the center. This collection is NOT an exhaustive library of all resources necessary for your assignments and research, but a collection appropriate for a field station and is focused on field guides. The library also has an extensive collection of English-language novels and travel guides for you to peruse in your free time.

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. You may also need your student ID number from your home university to access these library services.**

There are nine student computers available, running Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office software. All the assignments, paper, exercises are expected to be presented in computer output. Lack of access to resources will never be an excuse to presenting your work on time. Again, please remember we are trying to eliminate the use of paper at the center!

**Although internet is available, we are in a remote area and access can be quite unreliable and especially not up for recreational internet access especially if you expect to keep up with social networks. Downtown Atenas has many internet cafes and restaurants with internet access for recreational use.**

**Students should bring a laptop with them.** As a general recommendation, this should be a PC or Mac compatible laptop less than 6 years old, containing Microsoft Office 2003 or later software (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint), or office software that can export Microsoft Office compatible documents. Files can be transferred between your personal laptop and the Center's computers for printing or other purposes, using your own USB flash drive. You will not be able to connect your laptop directly to the Center network. You should also bring a portable surge suppressor, a laptop carrying case, and we recommend a security cable or lock to protect your laptop. In addition, do not expect to maintain your data in the cloud using google.docs or dropbox since access to internet is limited. Instead of keeping your data in the cloud, plan to use a USB drive or similar external data storage devices.

Please be aware that the heat and humidity can be very hard on laptop computers and can cause failure! It is good to understand that PCs are more common in Costa Rica and electronic repair centers are better equipped to handle PC repairs. **Apple electronic products do not do well in high humidity and are much more difficult to repair or replace in Costa Rica as there are very few authorized Apple repair centers and spare parts are very expensive.** Students have had success with storing their devices in a plastic Ziploc bag or waterproof case with rice when not in use to help absorb the humidity, but this is not a fool-proof option. In short, keep in mind that electronic devices could be damaged by the climate.

**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

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. Students are encouraged to store their laptops in their lockers whenever they are not in use.

All assignments can be saved to your network storage folder, which will be backed up by the network at the end of each day. This folder can be burned onto a CDR or copied to a USB stick prior to departure from the program. 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.

Our meals consist of some of the traditional local dishes based on rice, beans, vegetables, plantains, and fresh fruit; a very acceptable vegetarian menu. Meats and fish are also frequently available. Kitchen staff and rotating groups of students (pandilla chore groups) help to serve meals and clean. In addition, the kitchen staff serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day except Sundays. **On Sundays, each individual is responsible for cooking his or her own meals (with access to the main kitchen, leftovers, basic supplies, and supplies for sandwiches) or finding other dining options in town.**

We make an effort to keep snacks such as fruit, drinks (tea and coffee), bread, and spreads available all day until the kitchen closes in the evening. However, students should be aware that sometimes snack supplies do run out. Please keep the kitchen area (and the small food area in the dorm) clean and organized. Please do not store food in your rooms. Instead use the large Tupperware containers and the refrigerator in the dorm kitchen for this purpose. Consider that we have only one cleaning lady to oversee the Center. We rely on your good faith and responsibility to keep all common areas clean and neat.

## 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. We will try to accommodate students' religious observances. However, schedules often involve complex coordination with many parties and reservations are often made months in advance. Any missed program time will necessarily need to be made up.

## Cleaning

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Groups of students will rotate to help cleaning and composting every day after each meal. Also, there is a general cleaning rotation in which each student has to perform a task rotating each week. These tasks include tidying the dorms, working in the garden/farm and performing other Center maintenance tasks as deemed necessary. The chores are part of the aspects of sustainability we are learning at the Center. Several hours are scheduled each week for a thorough site clean-up, and every other week there is a house cleaning. Keeping your room clean is not optional. Mold and bugs thrive under tropical conditions especially in messy areas, so it is important to keep your space tidy. Keeping common areas clean is part of common courtesy since we all deserve a clean environment where to live and work. Do not give more work to the common room pandilla; be responsible and keep your working area clean.

## A Typical Day at the Center

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### 6 days a week (Sundays off)

- 7:00 Eat breakfast
- 8:00 RAP group meeting (Reflection, Announcements, Physicality)
- 8:30 Field work and/or lectures
- 12:00 Lunch
- 13:30 Lecture
- 15:00 Spanish/field work/lecture
- 18:00 Dinner
- 19:00 Directed Research lecture/presentation/workshop/guest lecture

## A Typical Week at the Center

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Our weekly schedule in Costa Rica 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). The mornings are filled by lectures, both in the classroom and the field, and field trips. Afternoons are generally filled with additional academic work and for semester students, Spanish lessons. Most of these activities take place in and around the Center, but many of them involve traveling throughout the Central Valley.

**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. Toward the latter half of the program, the lectures and organized classes diminish in frequency and open space to allocate time for Directed Research (DR) projects. Groups of approximately five to ten students generally go to a research site with a staff member to collect data. Additional meetings are scheduled to offer training sessions in the skills needed to complete the research. These include sessions on statistics, paper writing formats, computer spreadsheets, word processing, and laboratory analysis. In between DR activities we also schedule activities with the community, including workshops, seminars, and outreach projects. Throughout the program, one day a week is reserved for studying and relaxing (typically Sunday). Students also have two or three free weekends (Friday/Saturday morning through Sunday evening), and a five day mid-semester break.

**Center Hours:** Due to the residential nature of SFS programs, there is a designated time each evening by which students must be back at the Center. **The sign-in time is 10:30 PM Sunday through Thursday and 12am (midnight) on Friday and Saturday.** We will present specific information regarding Center curfew during Orientation at the beginning of each 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 La Presa 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 some want to socialize, another 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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Living at the Center for Sustainable Development Studies, you will have the opportunity to learn about and participate in the culture of Costa Rica. You will be involved in various programs that enable you to work directly with the community. Activities that have been offered in the past as part of the Culture and Spanish class include language exchanges with English students, planting trees, designing and maintaining a recycling program, teaching English, creating an environmental education class for an elementary school, and working with a local orphanage and nursing home. SFS has also been involved in local fundraising projects that include conducting bingo games, planning environmental fairs and participating in community sporting events. Each one of these activities is intended to connect our students with members of the community. Such interaction can assist in educating those involved about cultural traditions.

Many have benefited from working in such a collaborative effort and have continued to maintain contact with our neighbors. Further, if there are certain activities in which you have a specific interest, the Center staff will do their best to arrange a community connection that best meets your needs while still contributing to 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.

## Tico Family Day

You will learn more about the culture and family life of Costa Rica through a Tico Family Day experience. Tico Family Day in Costa Rica is a day-long experience that occurs during SFS semester programs only. Students will spend the day with a host family, sharing the activities of daily life such as shopping in the marketplace, preparing meals, or playing games and talking with extended family and neighbors. We screen host families carefully and many have participated for several years due to the positive experience that results from this exchange. Before Tico Family Day, you will be briefed on emergency contact information to use if you feel at all uncomfortable in a situation and a staff member will be "on call" during this time. Do not participate in activities which may present a risk to your health or safety during your host family experience, for SFS cannot provide supervision or be responsible for such activities.

## Language

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During semester programs, you will take a course entitled "Language, Culture and Community." The Spanish language component of this course aims to refresh your Spanish skills or give you a basic foundation in the language if it is new for you. It is important to understand that this is **not** a language immersion program.

If you wish to improve your Spanish on this program, it will be important for you to be proactive and learn from community activities, daily interactions at the center (i.e., the Spanish Table, and the Spanish Club), and interactions with the local community. During the course, you will receive basic formal Spanish instruction and participate in several cultural interaction activities. Several of the activities that are graded require some understanding of Spanish.

There is no language pre-requisite for this program, so students do arrive at varying levels of competency. Learning some basic Spanish phrases will greatly facilitate all interactions with community members, and participation in field exercises as well as enhance your research and personal experience in Costa Rica. Realize that although the program is taught in English, several of our field experiments include speaking with community members to collect data on which you will be evaluated. It will be helpful to be able to understand Spanish spoken by some of the local farmers and other community members in interviews.

Keep in mind that the amount of effort you put into improving your Spanish will be up to you!

## Weekends Away and Mid-Semester Break

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Semester programs in Costa Rica include a **Mid-Semester Break** during which time the Center is closed and students are expected to travel on their own). During this time, 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.

Semester programs also include some **Weekends Away**. During this time students may choose whether or not to remain at the center. If remaining at the center, all center rules and policies apply, including curfew.

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.** If you plan to have family visit you in Costa Rica during the program please plan accordingly as an exception will not be made.

Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor with any concerns regarding Weekends Away or Mid-Semester Break. **Dates will be sent to students by email as soon as they are available.**

## International Trip

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The semester program includes a trip to Panama during the program. The aim of the trip is to compare and contrast sustainable development in Costa Rica and one of its neighboring countries. Students will analyze the context-dependence of sustainable development, focusing on historical and environmental factors. Activities may include field exercises, visits to private and public national parks and reserves, community tourism projects, coffee plantations, and classes. Ask your Admissions Counselor for details.

**U.S. citizens do not need visas to enter Panama; students from other countries should verify whether this is also true for them or not.**

## Storing Personal Items

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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 semester program ends. Students must make appropriate arrangements for their belongings. Finca Huetares, located a short distance from the Center, offers secure and affordable overnight storage, usually at a cost of \$5/night.

## Communications

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### Internet

Internet access and e-mail are available for students at the Center to support research and educational work. **However, because of the location in a rural area, internet access is often unreliable and intermittent.** Better internet providers are not available because of the lack of customers interested in using internet (few neighbors own computers and/or are interested in using internet). In order to maintain the stability of the network, the following actions are prohibited:

- Downloading any non-research related files.
- Downloading large files, especially audio/video files.
- 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.
- The use of Skype, YouTube, Netflix; uploading photos/videos to Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat or other sites; streaming, Spotiify.

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

## Telephone

**Using your own cell phone:** It is possible to buy a micro-chip (SIM Card) from one of the cell phone companies in Costa Rica and use it in your current cell phone. Cell phones plan options usually include pre-paid or pay-as-you-go. With the local cell phone chip you will be able to make local calls, and depending on the plan you choose you will be able to make international calls (although the cost for international calls may be high). SFS center staff will not be able to help you obtain a cell phone chip, so you will have to do your own research to buy the correct chip for your particular phone and understand the payment options and obligations for the plan you choose. International phone coverage from your home carrier is often expensive and less reliable than this option.

Please keep in mind that many of the places we will visit/stay will not have reliable cell service, so plan to disconnect a bit from your phone on this program

**Center Landline and Calling Cards:** The Center has one telephone located in the dorm that students may use to make outgoing collect or phone card calls. It is possible to receive faxes at the local post office in Atenas at (011) (506) 446-5140. Please direct the fax to "Apdo. 150." However, students must arrange their own transportation (taxi) into Atenas during their limited free time to pick up the fax. In addition, there is a fee for receiving faxes at the post office of about 40 cents per page.

All outgoing calls must be either collect or with a calling card. International calling cards can be purchased locally for 5000 colones or approximately \$10 per 30 minute card. Another option is to call your US carrier and sign up for an international plan to get the cheapest possible rate. One place to find more information is [www.att.com](http://www.att.com).

**Note: Prepaid calling cards** purchased in the US do not work in Costa Rica. In addition, 800 numbers to the US are considered international calls in Costa Rica and are charged as such!

## Mail

Make sure your friends and family know the Center address and remind them that letters sent to Costa Rica should be marked AIRMAIL. The average one-way delivery time for airmail to Costa Rica is 5-14 days; 14-16 weeks for ground. Postage from Costa Rica to the U.S. currently costs about \$1.50 per letter.

Letters can be sent to students at the following address:

Student Name  
CEDS  
Apartado 150-4013  
Atenas  
Costa Rica  
Central America

**SFS does not recommend mailing packages to the center** as it can be costly and pick-up logistics can be very complicated. Please plan to bring all necessary items with you. **If you have prescription medicines or medical equipment, make sure to bring enough for the entire session, as you will not be able to receive this through the mail.**

## 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!

# Packing for Your Program

## Packing Tips

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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.**

There will be very few shopping opportunities and limited selection once you are in Costa Rica. 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 quarantine in Costa Rica.

**In case of luggage delays, SFS highly recommends packing the following items in your carry-on bag:**

- 2 changes of clothes
- Basic toiletries and essential medications
- 1 warm garment
- Camera
- Headlamp

**Test-pack your belongings to make sure you meet baggage requirements for your airline.** Policies differ by airline and are prone to changes so please check baggage limitations with your air carrier(s). Additionally, make sure that you can carry all of your belongings without assistance.

No matter what time of year you are going to Costa Rica, consider rain gear and quick-drying clothes!

Please keep in mind that the following packing list does not have amounts suggested, due to high variation in needs among students so please pack according to your own needs. Also consider labeling your clothing before arrival – with all students sharing the same laundry facilities, labels go a long way towards helping individuals keep track of their clothing.

## Packing List: Required Items

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### Required Clothing

- **Casual Shorts** (short shorts are not appropriate.)
- **Athletic shorts**
- **Long, lightweight pants** (Loose, fast-drying cotton or nylon pants are ideal; zip-offs are very useful.)
- **Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts** for protection against insects, sun, and cooler temperatures
- **Short-sleeved shirts or tank tops**
- **T-shirts** for hiking and field work
- **Wool or fleece sweater or sweatshirt, and sweatpants** (It can get cold in the evenings and at higher elevations on some field trips.)
- **Raincoat or poncho** (for dryness, not warmth; a waterproof shell that is also breathable is the most effective). An umbrella is also highly recommended for hiking in the rainforest. You may also want to consider bringing rain pants.
- **Nice clothing** to wear in Atenas or San José, on an evening out, or when conducting surveys. Most women wear skirts, long pants, or sundresses, while most men wear jeans/slacks and a casual collared shirt.
- **Casual clothing for days at the center but not performing field work**
- **Work pants/clothes to get dirty** while working in the field and on the farm
- **Swimsuit**

- **Socks** (some cotton, some wool-50/50 combination with polypropylene and wool work well, especially for hiking-don't forget to bring some high (knee-length) socks for use with your rubber boots!).
- **Underwear** (Women should remember to pack sports bras for field work.)
- **Hiking Boots** Please note: sneakers (even field runners!), Vibrams, and/or hiking sandals are NOT acceptable alternatives.
- **Rubber boots** – Please note: It is REQUIRED that students wear knee-high, thick rubber boots in the field as protection from snakebites. Pick rubber boots with a solid sole and nice traction.
- **Sandals with a heel strap (eg. Chacos/Tevas)** – these will be useful for walking around while not in the field or during field trips where you have the opportunity to swim in a water hole or river and where water footwear is mandatory
- **Sneakers or running shoes**
- **Rain/sun hat**
- **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 first aid kit:** You know your own special needs. During field trips we carry first aid kits for emergencies. Otherwise, you will have to purchase medicine or supplies at one of the local pharmacies. You can bring over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cold medicine, Pepto Bismol, etc. You should also have a bee sting kit (if necessary), Band-Aids, antiseptic cream, little scissors, aspirin, lip balm, sunscreen, motion sickness medication, any items for personal needs, etc. Some students also bring ear drops or earplugs to prevent swimmer's ear. Any OTC medication or first aid item that you may use on a regular basis can be found in Costa Rica at a slightly higher cost.
- **Soap and Shampoo:** We highly encourage students to bring with or purchase in Costa Rica biodegradable soaps, shampoos and conditioners. At the Center we have been converting to constructed wetland water treatment, which means that our water returns to the environment. Additionally on some field trips, conventional soaps and shampoos can have an impact on the environment. Not all soaps and shampoos labeled "natural" are biodegradable (Brands that are Biodegradable: Jason's Natural, Kiss My Face, Nature Gate-Rainwater, Dr. Bronners, Tom's of Maine, Desert Essence, and some Aveda and Garnier products). If you wish to wait until you arrive in Costa Rica to purchase your toiletries, BioLand is a Costa Rican company specializing in organic, biodegradable products, and the brand is carried at the local supermarket.
- **Tampons/sanitary pads and other toiletries:** This can also be purchased in Atenas, although at higher prices than in the US. Women may also consider alternatives to disposable tampons and pads (the Diva/Moon Cup, cotton "glad rags," etc), all of which should be purchased in the US.
- **Headlamp:** Lightweight, long-lasting, with new or spare batteries
- **Rechargeable batteries and RECHARGER** or enough batteries for length of program: Bring enough for your camera, flashlight, etc.
- **Water-resistant wristwatch with a stop watch function.**
- **Glasses or contact lenses.** Consider bringing an extra pair of glasses and plenty of contacts. To replace your contacts in Costa Rica you will have to pay for a complete eye exam and wait at least a month to receive the lenses. Glasses take a week. Also, make sure to bring enough contact solution to last the entire semester – it's very expensive to purchase in Costa Rica.
- **Medium-large plastic (Tupperware-type) sandwich container for packing lunches** (SFS eats out in the field quite often). These can also be easily purchased in Atenas.
- **Sunscreen, Minimum SPF 15 required,** although we recommend SPF 30 or greater. Sunscreen can also be purchased locally in the grocery stores and general stores in Atenas.
- **Insect repellent and anti-itch cream.** An effective repellent that contains 10%-35% DEET is recommended – preparations containing higher concentrations of DEET carry greater toxicity with little additional benefit. You might also consider natural repellants (e.g. Natrapel). Anti-itch cream/lotion/gel may also be helpful (e.g. After-Bite can't be found in Costa Rica). Conventional and natural repellants can also be purchased in Costa Rica.
- **Record of international travel immunizations.** This can aid in diagnosis and/or treatment should you get sick.

- **University student ID card**
- **A small gift for your hosts on Tico Family Day** - something unique or representative of your hometown is always a good option. You should also bring some pictures of your family, friends, and home to share.

### Required Items for the Dormitory

- **Bedding:** Lightweight sleeping bag/ thicker blanket other than a bed sheet to be used for cooler nights at the center (preferably synthetic, rated for warmer weather) and 1 set of twin sheets and a pillowcase. Pillows are provided, but you may still want to bring your own pillow. ***A sleeping bag is recommended for the Spring semester camping field trip. Please consider not to buy the most expensive type.***
- **A sleeping pad:** A sleeping pad will make you much more comfortable on camping trips. ***A sleeping pad is recommended for the Spring semester camping field trip.***
- **2 Towels:** Towels will mildew during rainy season unless hung in the sun every day. You should bring thin, quick dry towels.
- **Hand towels:** Bring a personal hand towel for use in the dormitory bathrooms (the Center does not provide paper towels in the dormitory bathrooms)
- **Travel alarm clock**, or other device you can use as an alarm clock
- ***SFS will provide a mosquito net for your bed***

### 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.***
- **USB FLASH DRIVE-at least 2.0 GB;** this is **REQUIRED**, as power outages and internet connection malfunctions are a common occurrence at the center. It will be necessary for you to back up all of your academic work on a flash drive to ensure that you do not lose vital information. Again, counting on storing your data in the cloud is risky if you need immediate access to it and the internet is down.
- **Calculator with basic statistical functions.**
- **Notebooks for 4 classes**, other school supplies as needed (can also be purchased in Atenas)
- **At least one waterproof notebook/journal** (very useful in the field), waterproof pen or pencil, (Website for waterproof materials: <http://www.riteintherain.com>) and consider a small binder with about 50 pages
- **Spanish-English dictionary** - we have many in the center library which you are welcome to use
- **Daypack** (for field work and to carry your notebook and water). You will be taking several overnight trips into the field, possibly including camping trips, so bring a sturdy water-resistant backpack of adequate size. You may want to consider purchasing a rain cover for your backpack, although garbage bags also work well for lining a backpack to make it waterproof.
- **A small to medium backpack or tote for your clothing and gear on overnight trips**, and a larger backpack or duffel for Panama, mid-semester break, and Directed Research
- **2 Water bottles of at least 1 liter each**
- **Lightweight garden gloves**
- **Umbrella**—small and packable-this is very important in the rainy tropics. These can also be purchased in Costa Rica.
- **A sweater or jacket**

## Packing List: Recommended Items

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### *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. SFS Costa Rica will provide some binoculars for use while on field trips. If you decide to bring your own, make sure it is water-proof.
- **Camera**
- **Sunglasses**
- **Casual shoes** for use in town and around the Center
- **Songbooks, poetry, personal journal, Hacky Sack, portable musical instruments, etc.**
- **Books or E-Reader** for pleasure reading – the library at the Center also has a collection of novels for students to borrow.
- **Pocketknife.** Swiss Army Spartan and Tinker are good models. Be sure to pack in checked luggage!
- **iPod or other MP3 player.** Please bring some of your favorite music for individual or group listening and dancing.
- **Movies to watch during free time** – the dorm TV has a DVD player and a HDMI cable.
- **Collapsible chair** (e.g. Crazy Creek style) for use during field lectures
- **Flip flops for use when showering** (highly recommended!)
- **Small sewing kit**
- **Earplugs and eye mask.** Very important if you are a light sleeper!
- **Personal power strip** for use in your dorm room
- **Guidebooks for Costa Rica** (Lonely Planet is a perennial favorite) - guidebooks can be found in our library
- **Ziplock bags** - Bring a few for personal items.
- **Waterproof Tent-** if you think you will want to use one over the mid-semester break or after the end of the program. (it is not advisable to use a tent during breaks during the Fall semester as the semester coincides with the rainy season in which there are almost daily rain/thunder storms, usually in the afternoon and overnight). ***SFS will provide tents for the Spring semester camping field trip. You do not need to buy a tent for this trip.***
- **Soccer cleats** – we have a soccer field at the Center, and many past students recommend bringing cleats if you already have them at home. It is common that soccer games are scheduled between staff on students on a weekly basis.
- **Yoga mat** – the center also provides 6-10 yoga mats for student use

# Planning Your Finances

In general, the best way to deal with money during your trip is to carry **undamaged cash** (i.e., crisp, clean, unwrinkled, un-frayed), a **debit card** for use at ATMs, and a **credit card** for traveling and/or emergencies.

Here are some important things to know:

- **Cash:**
  - 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. \$60 will be collected upon arrival at the Center, of which \$20 will go towards the cost of readings. These readings are mandatory for the courses you will be taking. The remaining \$40 will be used as a refundable security deposit. All or part of the security deposit may be withheld at the end of the semester for damage to items or the facility.
  - You will need your original passport (not a copy) with you to change money in any bank in Costa Rica.
  - Cash advances may be possible with Visa or Mastercard, but it takes several hours at the bank and involves a fee both at your bank and the Costa Rican bank. Having a PIN for your credit card (contact your credit card company if you need to obtain one) can help expedite this process. There is also a Western Union office located in Atenas, although it is a complicated process to wire money internationally and the office has very limited hours.
- **Cards:**
  - There are ATM's available in Atenas for foreign debit cards. VISA or PLUS is the most commonly accepted, Mastercard does work at some ATMs as well.
  - Please inform your bank and your credit card company that you will be traveling to Costa Rica and Panama, and that you will be making transactions from these destinations. Otherwise, they will likely block you for security purposes.
  - 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.
  - Visa and Mastercard are by far the most widely-accepted credit cards. It is more difficult to find outlets that accept American Express and Discover. Almost all of the nicer restaurants and grocery stores in Atenas accept credit cards. You will probably use your card mainly during the break or days off if you go to a more touristy area.
  - You must have at least one credit card with a minimum limit of \$1,000 in case of emergency (clinic/hospital trip) or unexpected expenses, but DO NOT depend on credit cards for your regular spending money.
  - In the case that you lose your credit/debit card, or it is stolen while in Costa Rica, it is possible to have money transferred to you via the local Western Union office located in one of the grocery stores in Atenas. This is helpful during the time you wait to have a replacement credit/debit card sent to you from the US.
- Personal checks are not accepted, even by banks. Traveler's Checks are not recommended by SFS.

**There is a safe at the Center for you to store your passport, cash, and other valuable items.**

We have included some cost estimates for the SFS program in Costa Rica below. The total amount will vary significantly with each individual's pre- and post-program travel plans, souvenir and equipment purchases, and expenses during days off, or weekly incidentals such as snacks, magazines, internet usage offsite, etc. It is very helpful to plan on having access to more money than you think you will spend.

## Estimated Costs

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Expenditure	Semester
Spending money (depends greatly on your spending habits and travel plans)	\$1000-1500
Security deposit for library/equipment use	\$40*
Fee for Course materials	\$20
Mid-semester break travel	\$300-400
Meals for non-program time	\$100-200
Money to purchase phone cards	\$10 per 30 min**
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1500+</b>

\* The deposit will be returned at the end of the program after an inventory of books, laboratory equipment, computers, and general property has been done. Please note that some of the deposit could be withheld for any lost books at the Center library, facilities or equipment, or damage to computers or property at the Center, or any other additional extra expenses. Money will be accepted at the Center (e.g. for deposits) in either dollars or colones (but not checks, money orders or traveler's checks).

\*\*Phone cards: The cost is always subject to change, but a good rule of thumb is to budget \$10x however many times you plan to call home for 30 minutes.

# 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 bags/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 potable. 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. Students must successfully complete a swim assessment, conducted by trained SFS staff, before participating in any 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 Costa Rica 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 10:30 pm on Sunday through Thursday. Curfew is 12:00 am on Friday and Saturday. Quiet hours begin at 10:00 pm every night.

#### **Buddy System**

During the first week on program, students must travel in groups of two or more whenever going past the "Y" in Barrio Los Angeles. Students are required to travel in groups of two or more whenever traveling outside of the Center after dusk or while on field trips or excursions.

#### **Shoes**

Due to the presence of snakes and other dangers, students must wear close-toed shoes (Spring Semester), and rubber boots (Fall Semester) at all times during field trips and excursions and after 6:00 pm while at the Center.

#### **Dress Code**

Costa Rica is a very conservative country, and modesty should be exercised. Out of respect for the community and the local culture, avoid dressing in tight clothing and short pants and skirts while in town. Shorts and tank tops are permitted on Campus.

#### **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 6:00 am to 9:00 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.

## 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 Costa Rica

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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.

Community health care in Costa Rica is provided by a system of public and private outpatient clinics and hospitals, as well as Red Cross emergency services. Advanced medical care is present in the city of San Jose. It is very important that you bring a method of payment (e.g. high limit credit card) to cover a deposit for services, usually several thousand dollars.

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 Costa Rica

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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 Costa Rica

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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 Costa Rica 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.

**Rabies** is a fatal viral infection that is transmitted from animals to humans through bites or scratches. The disease causes neurological symptoms that rapidly progress after a one to three month incubation period. Rabies is not currently in canid populations, including stray dogs which, in other countries, can be a more common source of rabies than wildlife. However, in Costa Rica there is always the potential for exposure from certain wildlife, including bats, primates, and small carnivores. The most effective way to avoid rabies is to avoid touching or getting too close to wildlife.

Alternatively, you can choose to receive the pre-exposure rabies vaccination prior to departing for Costa Rica. This vaccination series consists of three vaccinations administered over 21 to 28 days, so plan ahead accordingly. The vaccination does not eliminate the need for getting a post-exposure vaccination if you are bitten by a potentially rabid animal. It does, however, reduce the number of post-exposure injections that are required and eliminates the need to administer rabies immune globulin (which may not be available in Costa Rica). You should discuss with your doctor the advisability of receiving the pre-exposure rabies vaccination.

**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 Costa Rica 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 incidence of malaria near the field station and surrounding areas in Costa Rica is low. In Panama, you will visit Boquete and neighboring towns which are low risk for malaria.

**Yellow Fever** is not present in Costa Rica, 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 Costa Rica. 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 Costa Rica

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There are a number of non-vaccine preventable insect-borne diseases found in Costa Rica.

**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 (i.e., your room and working area organized and clean –Chagas bugs like dusty, dry areas), checking your mattress and bedding and washing your bed sheets on a frequent basis.

**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. Prevention includes minimizing exposed skin (long-sleeved shirts and pants) and applying insect repellent containing DEET.

**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. Prevention includes minimizing exposed skin (long-sleeved shirts and pants) and applying insect repellent containing DEET, especially between dusk and dawn, when the sand flies are most active. In addition, please use hotels and lodges providing rooms of minimal quality preventing mosquito/bug entry. Avoid sleeping outdoors (i.e., on hammocks).

**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 Costa Rica

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Some of the hazards associated with this SFS program, field work and living in Costa Rica 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:** There are approximately 200 drownings a year on Costa Rican beaches. Of these, an estimated 80 percent are caused by rip tides. Several of the Pacific beaches closest to the Center are particularly dangerous. 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).

**Altitude:** Altitude illness is a potentially fatal condition that can occur at elevations greater than 5,000 feet, but is more common at elevations greater than 8,000 feet. While the majority of the program is not at altitude, there are several small excursions to elevations greater than 8,000 feet. The most common complication, acute mountain sickness (AMS), has symptoms that include weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and insomnia.

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

**Volcanic Eruptions:** Although life-threatening volcanic activity in Costa Rica in recent past has been relatively low, disruptive volcanic activity is always a possibility. Small amounts of volcanic ash and mild doses of volcanic gases may disrupt car transportation, airport/ flight operations and cause medical complications for people with mild to severe respiratory conditions. Upon arrival, students are provided an orientation on precautions taken in case of a volcanic eruption, including the use of surgical masks to cover nose and mouth and emergency evacuation procedures.

**Snakes:** Costa Rica has approximately 15 species of poisonous snakes. Students are required to wear close-toed shoes after dusk. Upon arrival, students are provided with an orientation on snake precautions. At no time are students to handle snakes.

**Africanized Bees:** Most bees in Costa Rica 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. *(Center staff responsible for managing medical and health related issues during the program will also carry epinephrine as a back-up, and have been trained to administer epinephrine if needed).*

**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 roads in Costa Rica 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, or other motorized vehicle.

Please note this list is not exhaustive or complete. If you plan to travel to other areas, either inside or outside of the country, 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

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**

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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, students may find that the host community is much less accepting of homosexuality than the on-campus 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!**