



# **COSTA RICA**

## **FIELD GUIDE**

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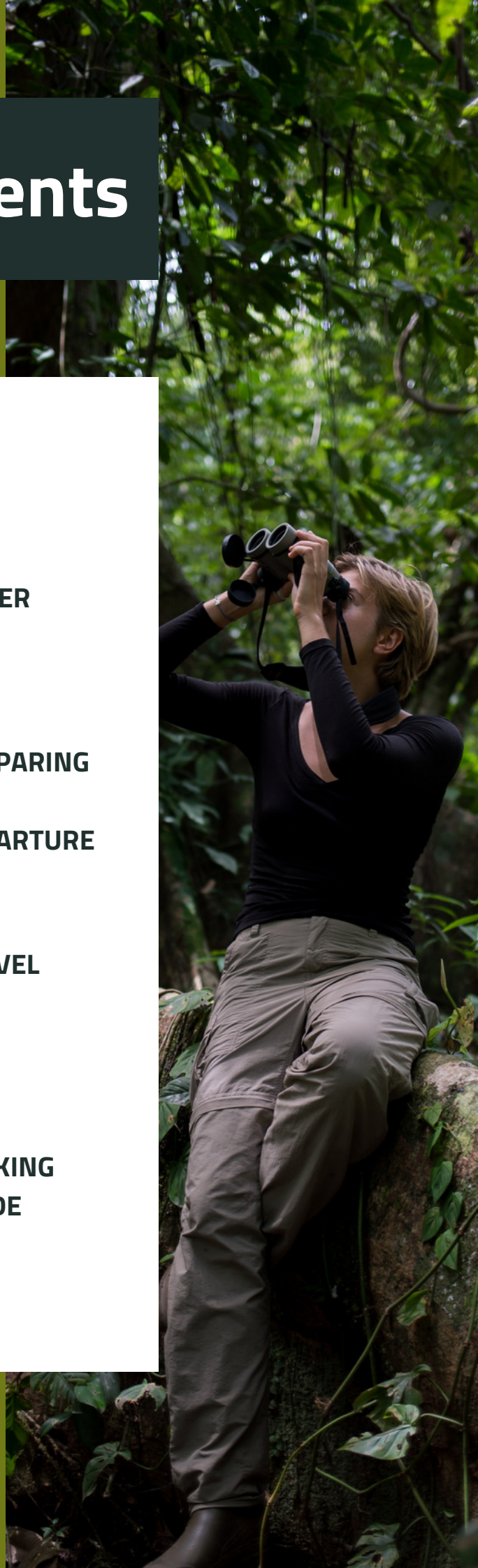
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**LIFE IN THE FIELD**



# The Center



## Academic Foci

- The center sits at the top of a hill overlooking the Rio Grande and Central Valley of San Jose.
- Costa Rica offers a rich patchwork of rainforests, cloud forests, beaches, and agricultural landscapes to explore and study.
- Efforts to preserve the wild beauty of Costa Rica are recognized worldwide, but climate change, tourism impacts, and increased urban development is bringing unforeseen changes impacting these fragile ecosystems.
- Costa Rica is home to sloths, toucans, hummingbirds, sea turtles, jaguars, howler monkeys, and much more!

### SEMESTER: ECONOMIC RESILIENCE STUDIES

Tropical ecosystems. Agroforestry. Carbon sequestration. Water systems. Food security. Sustainable tourism and conservation. Vertebrate ecology.

### SUMMER 1: BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Agriculture, agroforestry, and alternative farming practices. Ecological impacts of coffee and cacao production. Ecotourism and culinary tourism. Social justice.

### SUMMER 2: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FROM THE GROUND UP

Food security, seed sovereignty, and women's entrepreneurship in agriculture. Water access rights, management, and protection. Sustainable ecotourism. Agroforestry. Biodiversity analysis.



## Community Engagement

You will live at a field station as a cohort, rather than in a homestay, local apartment, or university dorm. This means that you will not necessarily be eating local cuisine, speaking a local language, or navigating the local culture every day. However, we fundamentally believe that meaningful research is only possible with the input of local people and in consideration of cultural history, so community engagement may vary each term to reflect the requests of our partners.



## Chores

Students are expected to take responsibility for their space during their stay. Students will help set up/clean for meals and engage in daily center-wide clean-ups. Specific chore responsibilities and schedules will be shared during orientation.



# Climate

Rainy season runs from May through November. Dry season runs from December through April. Average temperatures in Atenas range from 65-85°F. Be prepared for both colder and hotter weather during travel as weather varies with elevation and location.



# Identity

Every country is shaped by its history, and therefore attitudes towards gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion can differ greatly. Keep in mind that what seems like discrimination may simply be curiosity. Additionally, most students expect to encounter differences between themselves and their host country but don't realize the most significant differences may be between themselves and their student group. Students should research how different aspects of their identity might be perceived in a new context, in specific political and societal issues, racial, ethnic, and religious composition, LGBTQIA+ climate (Resources [1](#) and [2](#)), and cultural norms and local laws. Reflecting on one's own culture and identity before studying abroad can help students better navigate their experience abroad.

It is a privilege to study in another country and be welcomed into these communities. It is not our students' place to try and change its culture or values. While students will be learning about the country and its people, they will be ambassadors of their own country and culture. SFS campuses are permanent fixtures, and these communities are home to our staff members year-round. Behavior that is disrespectful, illegal, or contrary to cultural norms can degrade the relationship with the community and can impede meaningful interactions for peers, SFS staff members, and future students.



# Setting and Facilities

An active farm surrounded by fruit orchards and a community forest



## ATENAS

10-minute drive

Population ~27,000

Nearest town. Medical clinic, supermarkets, restaurants, banks, post office, and public transport.

## SAN JOSE

90-minute drive

Population ~1,400,000

Capital city. International airport and advanced medical care.

## HOUSING

Ten rooms, 4-6 people per room in twin bunk beds. Shared closet and desks, and individual shelving unit.

Shared bathrooms in dorm with showers (cold water) and western-style toilets.

## OTHER FACILITIES

- Common room with TV, games, and dorm kitchen.
- Classrooms, kitchen, dining area, staff offices, and some staff housing.
- Porch with hammocks, small pool, butterfly garden, vegetable garden, soccer field, basketball court, and coop with ducks and chickens.
- Two washing machines (detergent not provided). One dryer, but clothesline requested as weather permits.



## Food

SFS can accommodate most dietary needs, but the variety of food may be limited due to local availability and cost. SFS cannot accommodate strict Halal or Kosher diets. Due to limited dietary variety, SFS always recommends bringing vitamins, protein bars, nuts, favorite snacks, etc.

Meals may consist of rice, beans, vegetables, plantains, and fresh fruit. Snacks may include tea, coffee, toast with jam or other spreads, and pastries.



## Exercise

The center has yoga mats, a soccer field, basketball court, and small pool. Students can run in town with a buddy. The community also offers Zumba/dance classes weekly.



## Time-off

Students will have the option to leave campus most weekends. Semester students will also have a 7 to 9 day mid-semester break.

Students are responsible for their own food and accommodations during non-program time. Students are not allowed to stay at the center during the mid-semester break or interim between Summer 1 and Summer 2 sessions but may stay on campus during weekends off if desired. See page 11 for estimated costs.



## Money

The local currency is the Costa Rican Colón (CRC).

Both cash and debit/credit cards are widely accepted in cities. In rural areas, expect to use cash only. All students are required to bring a credit/debit card with at least \$3,000 in funds in case of emergencies. Mastercard and Visa are the most commonly accepted cards internationally. Be sure to notify your bank that you will be traveling internationally.

You should bring at least \$100 USD (bills no larger than \$20 USD) with you to start. Students can order CRC from their banks, exchange USD, or withdraw local currency directly from ATMs. When bringing USD to exchange, travel with bills in excellent condition (clean, unwrinkled, unmarked, with no tears). You will have access to ATMs to replenish your cash supply in Atenas. In general, expect to pay slightly more for things than you would in the U.S.





## Electricity

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The electrical voltage in Costa Rica is 120 (the U.S. uses 120). You will not need a voltage converter. Costa Rica uses plug type A (the U.S. uses A and B). All students should bring B to A plug adaptors.



## Internet

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Wireless internet is available at the center, but it is slow and intermittent. SFS reserves the right to limit internet activities occurring on our servers including, but not limited to, streaming or downloading audio/video content (Facetime, Netflix, etc.).



## Computers

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Students need to bring laptops with Microsoft Office (or the ability to open Microsoft files offline) and a USB port. Electronic devices are subjected to a much harsher environment than normal. In particular, Apple products do not fare well in high humidity and are more difficult to repair or replace locally. Please take precautions to protect your device.



## Phones

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Students with unlocked phones can purchase local SIM cards and phone plans for approximately ~\$20 USD a month. Most students choose to rely solely on WIFI.



## Mail

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No packages containing food of any kind can be sent to the center. The average one-way travel time for mail from the U.S. to Costa Rica is 5-21 days. Therefore, no mail can be sent during the last 3 weeks of programs, as students will not receive it! Mail will not be forwarded.

Address: Student Name, SFS Center for Sustainable Development Studies, Apartado 150-4013, Atenas, Costa Rica, Central America



# Health & Safety in the Field



## 24-Hour Emergency Hotline

SFS maintains a 24-hour emergency hotline. If you need to urgently contact a student in the field, call 978.219.5113.



## Student Health & Wellness Manager

The Student Health & Wellness Manager is a full-time primary medical responder and student support personnel on campus. They are certified in Wilderness First Response, or equivalent certification, and trained in sexual assault first response. They also counsel students on adjusting to life abroad, conduct risk assessments, and help coordinate program logistics and community outreach.



## Orientation

Upon arrival to campus, students receive an orientation about the local community and culture, center operations, and relevant risks and hazards. Prior to arriving on program, students should research the inherent risks associated with traveling abroad.



## Medical Care

SFS maintains a detailed risk assessment and management plan outlining risks and response protocols, including nearby medical facilities and their treatment capabilities. These plans ensure that staff are always aware of the best route for appropriate medical care.

If a visit to a medical care facility is needed, an SFS staff member will accompany the student to the appointment. Be aware that there may be times when access to medical care is delayed, such as on expedition. Students are responsible for all medical costs and all incidental expenses including transportation, accommodations, etc., incurred by all parties involved. This may include costs related to COVID-19 quarantining. Some medical emergencies or conditions may necessitate medical withdrawal from the program. Final decisions on medical withdrawal are made by SFS.



## Mental Health Support

Adjusting to new routines, relationships, and cultural environments while away from your usual support systems can be challenging. The ways you manage stress, take care of yourself, or find joy may not be available to you while you are abroad. Many students also struggle with the rigorous schedule that is inherent to the nature of SFS programs. Understand that you may have decreased communication with home, limited privacy and alone time, and infrequent or modified opportunities for exercise.

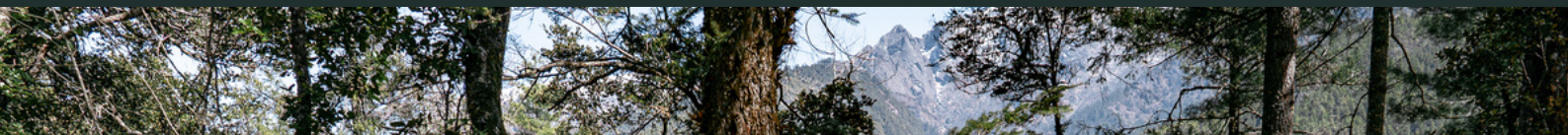
SFS is partnered with Morneau Shepell to provide students with access to free, mental health and wellness support by chat, phone, and video that can be accessed whenever connected to wifi. Students should download My Student Support Program (My SSP) in the app store or on the [My SSP website](#). My SSP is a supplemental resource, and students should work with their mental health provider to create a primary support plan. Students who undergo regular counseling should verify that their mental health provider is available while they are abroad.



# Sexual Health & Wellness

When it comes to sexual health and wellness during your program, please consider:

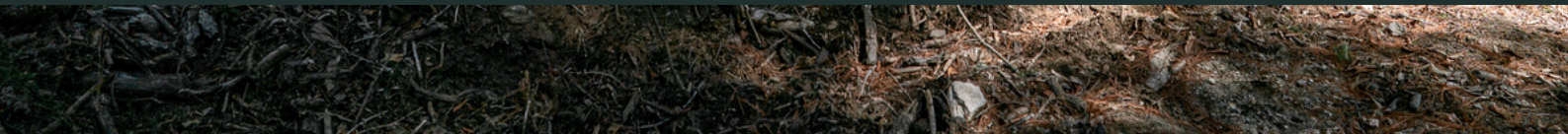
- The ramifications that a short-term relationship may have on a small residential campus or within the local community.
- Access to protection, medication for sexually transmitted infections, and emergency contraception may not be available.
- The current dialogue and understanding of consent in the U.S. does not always apply in other cultures.
- If you feel subjected to sexual harassment, you should walk away from any situation that makes you uncomfortable without concern for being culturally inappropriate. You can report harassment or assault to any SFS staff member.
- In the case of a sexual assault, SFS will make every effort to support you. This includes access to medical care, the option to report to local law enforcement, and identifying additional support resources. Local laws, definitions, and legal implications often differ from those in the U.S. Different laws and limited availability of resources such as rape kits can be complicating factors in responding to a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault in foreign countries.



## LGBTQIA+

SFS is welcoming of all students at our centers. However, when traveling throughout the country, please be aware of the following:

- Laws and social customs may differ from your home country, and countries that criminalize same-sex partnerships may also use the law to criminalize gender identities and gender expressions.
- Cultural practices may not support freedom of expression and travelers may experience discrimination and harassment.
- Some cultural practices are based on traditional gender roles and gender expressions. As a result, those who do not identify as they physically present may sometimes be misgendered or misidentified.
- Some languages are gendered, resulting in a lack of terms that encompass non-binary and gender-neutral identities.
- Health services specific to transgender people may be limited or unavailable. You may also be denied services in your affirmed gender while you are traveling abroad.
- It is not always possible to use preferred names or gender identities (visa paperwork, plane tickets, hotel reservations, and government sites). Gender X is not recognized worldwide, and you may need to provide binary sex information.



## Social Drinking & Drugs

There is no consumption or possession of alcohol allowed on campus. If you choose to consume alcohol on your days off in which you are off campus, please do so in moderation and maintain respectful behavior toward others.

Possession of marijuana and cannabis-infused products, including some cannabidiol (CBD) oils, is currently illegal under U.S. federal law. SFS does not allow possession or use of any drugs or medications that are illegal for the full duration of SFS programs including free time and weekends away. Check local laws before possessing, purchasing, or using electronic cigarettes or vaping devices on program.



## **PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE**



# Program Costs

The relationship SFS has with your school will determine your billing process. Within a week of acceptance, you or your school will be required to pay a non-refundable deposit to reserve your spot. Afterward, our finance department will reach out to you or your school to collect tuition payments. Up-to-date costs and refund policies can be found [here](#).

Included in SFS program costs are program advising and orientations, tuition and research fees, airport transfers, housing, meals during program time, field excursions and cultural activities, emergency evacuation and 24/7 support, and official transcript processing.

PROGRAM	BILLING DEADLINE
Spring	November 1st
Summer 1 or 1+2	April 1st
Summer 2	May 1st
Fall	June 1st

BASIC COSTS (BILLED BY SFS)	SEMESTER	SUMMER 1	SUMMER 2	SUMMER 1+2
Tuition	\$18,750	\$4,850	\$4,850	\$9,700
Room & Board	\$4,800	\$1,650	\$1,650	\$3,300
BASIC PROGRAM COST	\$23,550	\$6,500	\$6,500	\$13,000
ADDITIONAL COSTS (ESTIMATED, ACTUAL COSTS MAY VARY)				
Airfare	\$700	\$700	\$700	\$700
Passport	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200
Visa fees (if applicable)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Immunizations/Medications	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800
Personal Expenses	\$1,300	\$300	\$300	\$500
Program Breaks	\$1,500	\$500	\$500	\$1,000
ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL PROGRAM COSTS	\$4,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$3,200
TOTAL PROGRAM COSTS (BASIC + ADDITIONAL COSTS)				
ESTIMATED TOTAL PROGRAM COST	\$28,050	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$16,200



## Financial Aid

All students are welcome to apply for SFS financial aid. Financial aid applications are reviewed on a rolling basis starting in February for summer programs, April for fall programs, and September for spring programs. Early submissions are encouraged. Students who submit an SFS financial aid application by the payment deadline will be considered for our full range of aid options. Learn more [here](#).

# TRAVEL



## PASSPORT

You must have a passport in hand four months prior to departure that is valid for the entire length of stay in Costa Rica.



## VISA

Students will enter Costa Rica using a tourist visa. Students' Costa Rican visas will be granted upon arrival to Costa Rica and last 180 days. Nothing needs to be done for the visa pre-arrival. Tourist visas are currently free to obtain, but visa costs are the responsibility of the student, and prices are subject to change.

Non-U.S. citizens may require a different visa process and are responsible for applying for, obtaining, and paying for their own visa valid for the duration of their stay.

If traveling before or after the program, make sure that your visa will remain valid for the entirety of your stay.



## FLIGHTS

Students are responsible for the cost of flights to and from their program. Students will receive travel instructions at least 2 months prior to the start of their program. Do not book flights before receiving these instructions.

SFS staff will meet students at the airport on the date and time specified in the airport instructions and transport them to the center. Students will receive airport instructions 1-2 weeks prior to the start of their program. If traveling before the program, you are responsible for meeting the group at the airport at the designated date and time. Additionally, SFS is not responsible for transporting or storing luggage before or after the program.

SFS is not responsible for reimbursing travel expenses for programs canceled or rescheduled due to acts of war or civil unrest, strikes, weather, quarantine/epidemics/sickness, government regulations, or failure of equipment, power, or communications.





# Medical Requirements



## Medical Approval Process

Students are required to complete the SFS medical approval process using our HIPPA-compliant portal to inform SFS staff of their medical and mental health needs and accommodations. The review is not meant to exclude, but to inform and allow support systems to be put in place. No student may enter the field until medical approval is granted by SFS. [More information](#).



## Vaccinations & Medications

### Required

- At least 1 COVID-19 vaccine within 1 year of the program start date, but no less than 2 weeks before departure.

### Recommended

- [Centers for Disease Control](#), travel clinics, or medical providers can provide further recommendations.



## Accommodating Disabilities

SFS will work with students, schools, and physicians to determine the required accommodations and whether it can be safely and reasonably maintained on program. While SFS strives to meet students needs, due to the remote nature of the programs, there are varying levels of accessibility, services, and accommodations. Students with questions regarding physical or mental health accommodations should contact the Office of Student Affairs and learning accommodations should contact the Office of Academic Affairs.



## Insurance

Students are required to buy health insurance. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their coverage is valid in their program country(s) for the full duration of their program and covers basic medical care, including non-urgent illness or injury, laboratory tests, and pharmaceutical needs. SFS does not provide company recommendations. Keep in mind:

- Most domestic health insurance plans do not provide comprehensive coverage for out-of-country medical expenses.
- Schools may provide international health insurance or have their own insurance requirements for studying abroad.
- Most insurance companies provide coverage on a reimbursable basis. Therefore, students need to bring a credit card to pay for medical expenses and then request reimbursement later on.

### Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation Insurance

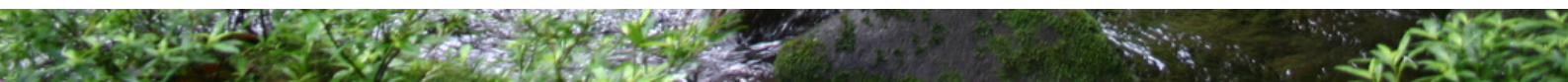
All students are automatically enrolled in an emergency evacuation and repatriation insurance plan through American International Group, Inc. (AIG) for the duration of their program only. This plan covers the cost of transportation, accommodations, and medical care associated with medically or politically necessary evacuations (e.g. life-saving support during air evacuation). It includes up to \$350,000 for emergency medical evacuation, \$100,000 for emergency security evacuation, and \$20,000 for repatriation of remains. The coverage provided does not cover basic medical care, laboratory tests, or pharmacy needs. Students on SFS programs are required to supply their own comprehensive health insurance as outlined above.



## **PACKING GUIDE**



# Packing Considerations



## Luggage

SFS does not have a specific policy regarding how much or what type of luggage students bring, so pack according to your needs. Make sure you bring only what you can maneuver yourself, and check with all airlines for luggage restrictions and fees.

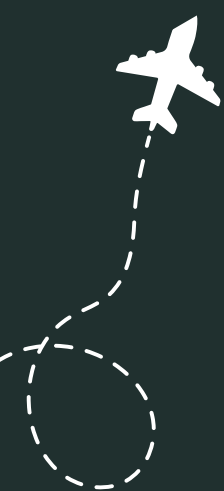


## Culture & Climate

Many students bring old clothes to wear in the field and leave behind at the end of the program. Do not bring anything that you would not want damaged!

A minimum of 3-inch seams are required for all shorts worn in town. Additionally, crop tops are not appropriate community wear.

As you pack, please consider the impact of the products that you bring with you to your program, both the ingredients and packaging. Plastic can be difficult for waste management in remote environments. Think about bringing a reusable tote, metal straw, cloth napkins, etc. We also highly encourage biodegradable soaps, shampoos, and conditioners.





# Required Packing

- **Pants** Lightweight blends that dry quickly. 2+ for field work, 2+ jeans/leggings/normal pants for day to day, and comfy pants for around the center.
  - **Shorts** Minimum of 3-inch seam for shorts worn in town. Runners may want a few pairs of athletic shorts.
  - **T-shirts and Tank tops** Keep them loose-fitting with no midriff exposed.
  - **Long-sleeved shirts** A mix of synthetic fabrics and cotton.
  - **Casual/nice clothes** for town.
  - **Sweater, sweatshirt, and sweatpants**
  - **Waterproof jacket with a hood or Poncho** Water resistant is not sufficient.
  - **Underwear and Socks** including mostly light wool or synthetic (not cotton) hiking socks and some knee-high socks for use with rainboots.
  - **Pajamas** appropriate for shared spaces
  - **Swimsuit** non-revealing one-piece or two-piece
  - **Sun hat and sunglasses** Hat should have brim.
  - **Hiking boots** Over-the-ankle and preferably waterproof.
  - **Sneakers** or other casual shoes.
  - **Rain boots** The center has several pairs of rain boots that you can use, but if you have an especially large or small foot it is recommended you bring your own. If you want your own pair, lightweight, shin-high boots with good tread are best.
  - **Sandals** with heel strap.
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- Sheets, a pillow, and mosquito net will be provided at the center.
  - **Towels** 2 large shower towels and 1 face/hand towel for trips. Quick dry towels are best!
  - **Toiletries and Laundry detergent** Basic items can be purchased in town, but you should plan to bring enough with you for at least a week. Preferably biodegradable.



- **Masks and COVID tests** Bring enough masks to last the duration of the program and home rapid tests.
  - **Record of immunizations and Health history**
  - **Personal first-aid kit** including Anti-itch creams, Neosporin, Bacitracin, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Pepto Bismol, Band-Aids, Tape, Tweezers, Nail clippers, Antihistamines, Pro-biotics, Antidiarrheals, Vitamin C, Cold medicines, Hydration salts, etc.
  - **Prescriptions** Note that overseas prescriptions are not always accepted. You should bring adequate supplies of prescription medications with you to last the duration of your program alongside your doctor's prescription to avoid customs delays. Think about inhalers, allergy medication, contacts/glasses, etc.
  - **Motion sickness medication/ Dramamine/ Ginger chews** if you experience motion sickness.
  - **Period care** You can purchase basic period products in town. We encourage you to use a menstrual cup or environmentally friendly, biodegradable options.
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- **Flash drives and/or External hard drive** At least 2 GB recommended
  - **Computer** that can open Microsoft Office documents offline and has a USB port.
  - **Surge protector and Plug adaptors**
  - **Wristwatch** Preferably water-resistant or waterproof.
  - **Headlamp with extra rechargeable batteries** Flashlight is not a replacement but can be brought additionally.
  - **Umbrella** Can buy locally.
  - **Gardening gloves**
  - **Day pack** Suitable for taking gear into the field. 15-30L recommended.
  - **Weekend bag** to bring on overnight field excursions or weekends. 35-55L recommended.
  - **Notebooks and Pens/Pencils** Can buy locally.
  - **Water bottles** 2 bottles with at least 1L capacity each.
  - **Sunscreen** 1+ bottles.
  - **Insect Repellent** 1+ bottles.
  - **Tupperware and Travel mugs** for packing lunches. Can buy locally.



# Optional Packing

- **Purse/tote bag** for town.
- **Small clothing repair kit**
- **Laundry bag**
- **Flip flops** for showering.
- **Soccer cleats**
- **Dry bags, waterproof day pack cover, or sturdy plastic bags** Gallon-sized Ziploc bags work well.
- **Pocketknife** Checked luggage only.
- **Hammock**
- **Collapsible chair** Crazy Creek, etc.
- **University ID** for local ticket discounts.
- **Waterproof notebook** Rite-in-the-Rain is a good brand.

- **Earplugs and Eye mask**
- **Baby wipes and Hand sanitizer** Can purchase in town.
- **Journal**
- **Games, Movies, Books, and Crafts**
- **Snacks, Drink powders, and Dietary supplements** Any favorites.
- **Camera**
- **Headphones and/or Bluetooth speaker** Noise canceling recommended.
- **Waterproof cases for electronics and silicone packets** (or some water-absorbing equivalent).
- **Binoculars** Preferably 8 x 40 but anything in the 6 x 30 to 10 x 40 range is fine.
- **Extra batteries and External battery packs**



## Contact Us

**Keep up with SFS** follow us on Instagram [@theSFS/](#)[@SFS\\_costarica](#), read [news from the field](#), and find the [full list of the SFS team bios here!](#)

**Questions about billing?** [Billing@fieldstudies.org](mailto:Billing@fieldstudies.org)

Deposit payments, invoices, charges to your account, financial aid packages, billing deadlines, and loan paperwork.

**Questions about health and safety?** [StudentLife@fieldstudies.org](mailto:StudentLife@fieldstudies.org)

Medical paperwork, Immunizations, managing medical conditions during your program, and dietary needs and preferences.

**Questions about academics?** [Academics@fieldstudies.org](mailto:Academics@fieldstudies.org)

Learning accommodations, syllabi, and directed research.

**Questions about admissions or enrollment?** [Admissions@fieldstudies.org](mailto:Admissions@fieldstudies.org)

Which program is the best fit for you, application materials, travel and visa logistics, and other program-specific questions.