



# **COSTA RICA**

## **FIELD GUIDE**



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**LIFE IN THE FIELD**



## 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 are bringing unforeseen changes impacting these fragile ecosystems.

### SEMESTER: ECOLOGICAL 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.

Each program combines theory learned in the classroom alongside field-based applications. Time in the classroom is structured to give students a solid understanding of environmental history, theory, and conservation techniques before deploying their knowledge or specific techniques in the field. All classes are taught in English.



## Setting and Facilities

An active farm surrounded by orchards and forests

RURAL ← ● → URBAN

### ATENAS

10-minute drive or 45-minute walk

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.





# Community Interaction

Students live at a center rather than a homestay, local apartment, or university dorm. This means they will not navigate the local culture, cuisine, or language every day. However, meaningful research is only possible with the input of local people, so community engagement and Directed Research projects vary each term to reflect the requests of our partners. Some examples of past outreach initiatives include planting trees, working in community gardens, picking up trash, and outreach at schools.



## Chores

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



## Campus Policies

Because center locations are often unfamiliar to students, there are campus policies in place to keep students safe including nightly curfew, sign-out logs, and a buddy system. Note that during program time students are obligated to stay at the center, and no non-SFS guests are allowed on campus. If family or friends are planning on visiting you, do so during program breaks or coordinate with the center director for approval before. Time off during program time to spend with guests is limited. More specific campus policies will be shared during orientation.



## Time-off

Students will have highly structured schedules on weekdays, with weekends generally free. Attendance is required for all activities including multi-day trips that may fall on the weekends. Students will have the option to leave campus most weekends. Semester students will also have a 7-9 day mid-semester break. Travel to certain regions or neighboring countries during time off may be prohibited based on risk levels or center policies.

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 12 for estimated costs.



## Alcohol & Substances

Consumption or possession of alcohol is prohibited on campus. Students who consume alcohol during non-program time, need to do so in moderation and maintain respectful behavior toward others.

SFS does not allow possession or use of any medications or substances that are illegal in the U.S. or host country for the full duration of SFS programs including free time and weekends away. Check local laws before possessing, purchasing, or using e-cigarettes or vaping devices on program.







## Food

SFS can support most dietary needs, but the variety of food will be extremely limited due to local availability and cost. SFS cannot accommodate strict Halal or Kosher diets. Meals are simple and repeat every week, so 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 spreads.



## 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 paid Zumba/dance classes weekly.



## Climate

Students will be exposed to high heat and humidity and rain and mud. Rainy season runs May - November. Dry season runs December - April. Average temperatures in Atenas range from 65-85°F. Be prepared for both colder and hotter weather during travel as weather varies with location.



## Money

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

Both cash and debit/credit cards are widely accepted in cities. In taxis and 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. Notify banks about international travel.

Bring at least \$100 USD (bills no larger than \$20 USD) to start (see page 12). CRC can be ordered from banks prior to travel, exchanged for USD, or withdrawn from ATMs. When bringing USD to exchange, travel with bills in excellent condition (clean, unwrinkled, unmarked, with no tears). Students will have access to ATMs in Atenas. In general, expect slightly higher costs in Costa Rica than in the U.S.



## Considerations

**Language:** Spanish is the official language. Locals have intermediate to advanced knowledge of English. Students without basic Spanish may find interactions with locals limited. Most of your time will be spent with your cohort, so do not expect to practice the local language daily.

**Culture and Diversity:** 90% identify as White or Mixed and 1% Black. 87% are Christians. Racial features are used as nicknames (Gringo, Negro, etc.). Spanish is a gendered language, and catcalling is common.

**Physical Rigor:** Students must hike for up to 3 hours at a time. During overnight trips, students will sleep in remote field environments with limited amenities.

**Hazards:** Snakes, spiders, scorpions, insects, bats, monkeys, heat and humidity, etc.

**Travel:** Students will frequently travel short and long distances by car.





## Electricity

The electrical voltage in Costa Rica is the same as in the U.S. Students 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

Wireless internet is available at the center, but it is slow and sometimes unavailable. 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

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 all devices.



## Phones

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

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, Escuela para Estudios del Medio Ambiente  
PO BOX 150-4013 Atenas, Alajuela, Costa Rica.







# Sample Schedule

This is just a sample; no one week will follow this outline exactly. Students will receive program schedules after their arrival. Schedules are always subject to change based on weather, event availability, and other factors outside of SFS’ control, including the day of, so students should arrive with a flexible mindset. All events apart from Free Time are mandatory.

Students should expect long days in the classroom at the start of the program transitioning into fieldwork and independent study.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<div>Optional Weekend Away</div> <div>Most weekends students may leave the center to travel, but traveling students will be responsible for their own accommodation, food, and transport. See Page 12 for budgeted costs.</div>	7-8:30am Breakfast and Morning Meeting	7-8:30am Breakfast and Morning Meeting	7-8:30am Breakfast and Morning Meeting	7-8am Breakfast and Pack Lunch	7-8:30am Breakfast and Morning Meeting	<div>Optional Weekend Away</div> <div>Most weekends students may leave the center to travel, but traveling students will be responsible for their own accommodation, food, and transport. See Page 12 for budgeted costs.</div>
	8:30- 11:30am Justice, Resilience, & the Environment - Field Exercise	8:30- 11:30am Principles of Natural Resource Management - Field Exercise	8:30am-12pm Community Engagement	8am-6pm Field Trip w/ Lunch in the Field  Field trips can be any day of the week and occasionally last multiple days.	8:30-9:30am Principles of Natural Resource Management - Lecture	
	12-1pm Lunch	12-1pm Lunch	12-1pm Lunch		10- 11am Language, Culture, & Society of Costa Rica - Project	
	1:30- 3pm Justice, Resilience, & the Environment - Lecture	1:30-3:30pm Tropical Ecology & Ecosystem Resilience - Documentary	1:30-3:30pm Tropical Ecology & Ecosystem Resilience - Lecture		12-1pm Lunch	
	3-5pm Language, Culture, & Society of Costa Rica - Lecture	3:30-6pm Tropical Ecology & Ecosystem Resilience - Lecture	3:30-5pm Free Time at the Center		2-3pm Justice, Resilience, & the Environment - Guest Lecture	
	5-6pm Free Time at the Center (Laundry, Homework, Relaxation)		5-6pm Principles of Natural Resource Management - Evaluation		3:30-4:30pm Principles of Natural Resource Management - Lecture	
	6-7pm Dinner	6-7pm Dinner	6-7pm Dinner		4:30-6pm Free Time at the Center	
	7-9pm Free Time on your own	7-9pm Free Time on your own	7-9pm Free Time on your own		6-7pm Dinner	
					7-10pm Free Time on your own	
9pm Curfew	9pm Curfew	9pm Curfew	9pm Curfew	9pm Curfew	10pm Curfew	10pm Curfew

- Meals and Announcements
- Free Time
- Community Engagement
- Classroom Time
- Field Work
- Curfew



# Health & Safety in the Field



## 24-Hour Emergency Hotline

SFS maintains a 24-hour emergency hotline. To urgently contact a student in the field, call 978.219.5113.



## 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 an equivalent certification, and trained in sexual assault first response. They also counsel students on life abroad, conduct risk assessments, attend medical appointments, and help coordinate program logistics.



## Orientation

Prior to departure, SFS requires attendance at a pre-departure orientation focused on essential aspects of the program. Students must also research the inherent risks associated with traveling abroad and cultural considerations themselves. Upon arrival to campus, students receive an additional orientation about the local community and culture, center operations, and relevant risks.



## Medical Care

SFS maintains detailed risk assessment and management plans. If a medical care facility visit is needed, staff will accompany the student to the appointment. There may be times when medical care is delayed. Students are responsible for all medical costs and all incidental expenses incurred by all parties involved including transportation, accommodations, etc. This may include costs related to COVID-19 quarantining. Some medical conditions may necessitate medical withdrawal from the program. Final decisions on medical withdrawals are made by SFS. See the Health and Safety Guide for more information.



## Mental Health Support

Adjusting to new environments while away from usual support systems is challenging. While abroad, there is decreased communication with home, limited privacy, and fewer opportunities for exercise. Many students find the rigorous schedule of SFS programs and the rare opportunities for alone time overwhelming.

SFS is partnered with Telus Health ([My SSP website](#)) to provide students with access to free, mental health and wellness support via WIFI. My SSP is a supplemental resource, and students should work with their mental health provider to create a primary support plan while abroad. See the Health and Safety Guide for more information.

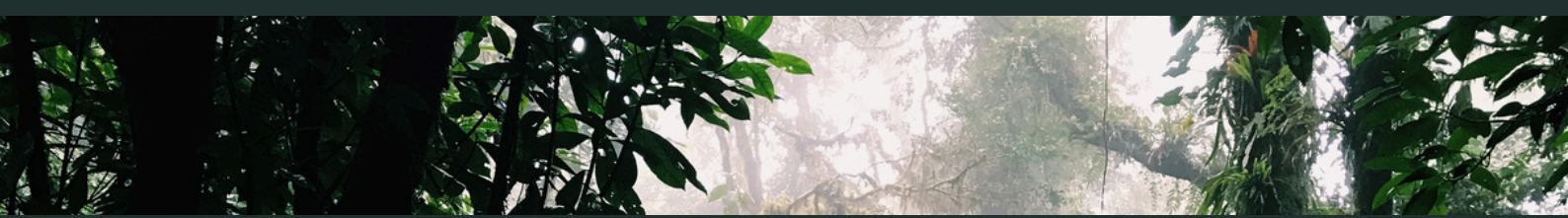




# Identity

Each country is shaped by its history, and therefore attitudes towards gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion can differ greatly. What seems like discrimination may simply be curiosity. Students should research how their identity might be perceived in a new context.

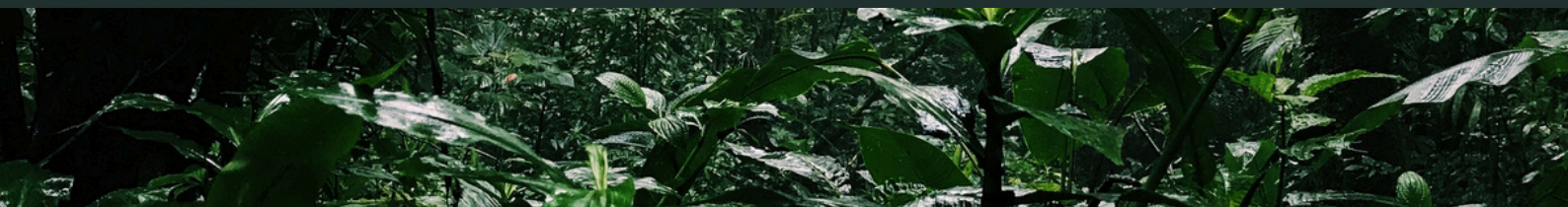
Studying abroad is a privilege, and it is not our students' place to change the host country's culture or values. SFS campuses are permanent fixtures and home to staff year-round. As representatives of SFS and students' own countries, behavior that is disrespectful, illegal, or contrary to cultural norms can degrade the relationship with the community.



## Sexual Health & Wellness

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 anyone feels subjected to sexual harassment, they should walk away from the situation without concern for being culturally inappropriate. They can report harassment or assault to any staff member.
- In the case of a sexual assault, SFS provides support to student including access to medical care and support systems and the option to report to law enforcement. However, local laws and limited availability of resources such as rape kits can complicate reports of sexual harassment or sexual assault in foreign countries.



## LGBTQIA+

SFS welcomes all students at our centers, but recommends students know the following:

- Laws and social customs of the host country may criminalize same-sex relationships or certain gender expressions.
- Travelers may experience discrimination and harassment.
- Some cultural practices are based on traditional gender roles. As a result, some students might be misgendered.
- 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.
- It is not always possible to use preferred names or genders (visa paperwork, plane tickets, hotel reservations, and government sites). Gender X is not recognized worldwide, and students may need to provide binary sex information. See the LGBTQ+ Resource Guide for more information.



**PREPARING FOR  
DEPARTURE**





# Program Costs

The relationship SFS has with students' schools will determine the billing process. Within a week of acceptance, students or their schools will be required to pay a non-refundable deposit to reserve their spot. Afterward, we will reach out to students or their schools 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 and meals during program time, field excursions and cultural activities, official transcript processing, and evacuation and 24/7 support in case of emergencies.

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	\$21,500	\$4,950	\$4,950	\$9,900
Room & Board	\$5,000	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$3,500
BASIC PROGRAM COST	\$26,500	\$6,700	\$6,700	\$13,400
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	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200
Personal Expenses	\$1,300	\$300	\$300	\$500
Program Breaks - Accommodation & Food	\$1,500	\$500	\$500	\$1,500
ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL PROGRAM COSTS	\$3,900	\$1,900	\$1,900	\$3,100
TOTAL PROGRAM COSTS (BASIC + ADDITIONAL COSTS)				
ESTIMATED TOTAL PROGRAM COST	\$30,400	\$8,600	\$8,600	\$16,500



## Financial Aid

All students are encouraged 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 welcomed. 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

Students 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 up to 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, students should make sure that the visa will remain valid for their entire 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 students are traveling before the program, they 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. 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. See Medical Review Guide for more information.



## Vaccinations & Medications

### Required

- None

### Recommended

- Centers for Disease Control, travel clinics, or medical providers can provide further recommendations.



## Internal Health Insurance

Students are required to buy international health insurance. Students will receive international health insurance requirements upon acceptance to their program. Keep in mind most companies reimburse medical costs, so students need an emergency credit card/debit card with at least \$3,000 USD to pay for medical expenses upfront.

All students are enrolled in an emergency evacuation and repatriation insurance plan through American International Group, Inc. (AIG) for the duration of their program only. This is supplemental insurance to students' own comprehensive health insurance outlined above. See Medical Review Guide for more information.



## Accommodating Disabilities

SFS works with students, schools, and physicians to determine required accommodations and whether they can be safely and reasonably maintained on program. We strive to meet students' needs, but due to the remote nature of programs, there are varying levels of accessibility. Questions regarding health or learning accommodations can be directed to the Office of Student Affairs or the Office of Academic Affairs respectively.

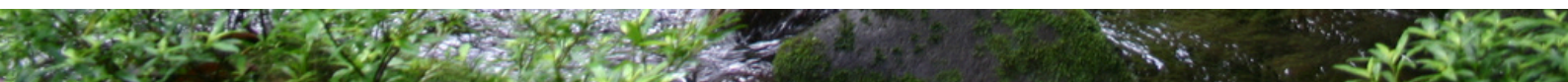


## **PACKING GUIDE**





# Packing Considerations



## Luggage

SFS does not have a specific policy regarding how much or what type of luggage students bring, however, you will be sharing a room and you will have limited space to store your belongings. Bring only what can be maneuvered oneself and check with all airlines for luggage restrictions and fees.

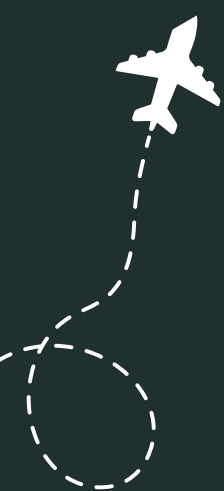


## Culture & Climate

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

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

While packing, consider the impact of the products brought to the 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. Past students recommend 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. Enough for a week.
- **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** Lightweight, shin-high boots with good tread are best. Can buy locally unless you have a very large or small shoe size.
- 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** Basic items can be purchased in town but bring enough for at least a week. Preferably biodegradable.



- **COVID-19 Home Test Kits and KN95 Masks** for personal use. 2-3 tests and 5 masks recommended. Local availability may be limited.
- **Record of immunizations and Health history**
- **Personal first-aid kit** Consider 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** Overseas prescriptions are not always accepted. Bring adequate supplies of prescription medications to last the duration of the program alongside doctors' prescriptions to avoid customs delays. Think about inhalers, allergy medication, contacts/glasses, etc.
- **Motion sickness medication/ Dramamine/ Ginger chews**
- **Period care** Students can purchase basic period products in town. We encourage menstrual cups or environmentally friendly, biodegradable options.
- **Computer** that can open Microsoft Office documents offline and has a USB port.
- **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. Lotion recommended.
- **Insect Repellent** 1+ bottles. Lotion recommended.
- **Tupperware and Travel mugs** for packing lunches. Can buy locally.





# Optional Packing

- **Purse/tote bag** for town.
- **Sandals** recommended with heel strap.
- **Shoe Inserts** for rainboots.
- **Small clothing repair kit**
- **Laundry bag**
- **Flip flops** for showering.
- **Soccer cleats** There is a field at the center.
- **Dry bags, waterproof day pack cover, or sturdy plastic bags** Gallon-sized Ziploc bags work well.
- **Pocketknife** Checked luggage only.
- **Mosquito head net**
- **Hammock**
- **Blanket**
- **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).
- **Wristwatch** Preferably water-resistant or waterproof
- **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, billing deadlines, financial aid packages, and loan paperwork.

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

Medical paperwork, immunizations, managing medical conditions, 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, application materials, and travel and visa logistics.