University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Study Abroad



SAN RAMÓN, COSTA RICA
FALL 2018

Program Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General Information 2
- The Program 2
- The Location 2
- Academic Calendar 2
- The University 2

Academics 2
- Program Prerequisites 2
- Registration in Costa Rica 2
- Add/Drop Courses On Site 3
- Withdrawing from USAC Courses 3
- Credits and Course load 3
- Class/Activity Attendance 3
- Grades 3
- Grade Reports 3
- Foreign Language Immersion Requirement 4
- The Academic Program 4
- Volunteering 5
- Service-Learning Requirement 5

Money Matters 5
- Cost Estimate 5
- Currency Exchange 5

Money Abroad 6
- ***ATMs*** 6
- ***Credit/Debit Cards*** 6
- ***Traveler's Checks*** 6

Health & Safety 6
- Before You Go 6
- Common Health Problems 6
- Water 7
- Insect Bites 8
- Zika Virus 8
- Health Facilities in Costa Rica 8
- Emergency Contacts 8
- Safety in Costa Rica 8
- Marijuana and other Illegal Drugs 9
- 911 Equivalent in Costa Rica 9

Required Documents 9
- Visa 9

Packing Tips 10
- Weather 10
- Packing Less is More 10
- Clothing 10
- Gifts 10
- What to Pack 10
- Do Not Bring 10
- Appliances 10

Arrival/Departure 10
- Travel Arrangements 11
- USAC Group Flight 11
- Early Arrivals 11
- Airport Pick-Up Service 11
- Clearing Immigration & Customs 11
- Late Arrivals-Expected and Unexpected ... 12
- Leaving Costa Rica 12

Settling In 12
- Orientation 12
- Homestays 12
- Financial Arrangements 13
- The House 13

Guests 14
Telephone 14
Water 14
Toilets 14
Laundry 14
Meals 14
The Refrigerator 15
Keep Lines of Communication Open 15
Checking In 15
Visiting Your Host Family After the Program Ends 15
Communication 15
Telephone Information 15
Internet 16
Cultural Notes 16
Greetings and Addresses 16
Tico Time 16
"Developing World" 17
Family 17
Gender Issues 17
"Piropos" 18
Other Notes 18
Travel While Abroad 18
Program Excursions 18
Optional Excursions 18
Guidebooks 18
Contact Names & Addresses 19
WEB RESOURCES: COSTA RICA 20
Costa Rica 20
Culture 20
Travel 20

CONGRATULATIONS on being accepted to the UW-Eau Claire program with USAC to San Ramón, Costa Rica. Living and studying in a foreign culture is both an exciting and a challenging experience. Past participants of study abroad report that the many advantages of international study include:

Building upon foreign language skills
Gaining new perspectives on a chosen academic field
Increasing understanding of different cultures
Developing different perspectives on U.S. culture
Gaining self-confidence and independence
Learning skills for the future international job market

It is up to you to determine how you can best benefit from these possible advantages. This is your adventure!

This program guide is to be used together with the general Study Abroad (SA) Handbook. The SA Handbook has information that is valid for all study abroad programs. This guide will provide you with specific information for the Costa Rica study abroad program. It is designed to complement the SA Handbook, study abroad orientation, and your individual pre-departure preparations.

Please realize that, although this guide contains all of the information available at the time of printing, it is impossible for any single resource to answer all of your questions. Your peer adviser will email additional information throughout the semester. Please contact the Center for International Education (CIE) staff, your peer adviser, and past program participants with your specific questions. You should also make use of the additional written and web resources listed towards the end of this guide.

Basic questions only you can answer include:

1) What are YOUR goals for this experience? Common objectives of student travelers include advancement in future profession, desire to gain fluency in a second language, wish to expand personal and academic horizons, need for a change, wish to challenge oneself with immersion in a new culture.

2) Given the way the program is set up, how can you best prepare to meet your goals? For example, if one of your goals is truly being immersed in Costa Rican culture, yet you are going with a group of UW-Eau Claire students, how can you ensure that you do not spend too much time with other U.S. Americans?

The information in this guide was current at the time of printing, though changes may occur at any time.

General Information

The Program

UW-Eau Claire has partnered with University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) to offer students the opportunity to study the Spanish language and Latin American cultures. You will live with host families to help you fully experience the local culture. Some field trips will be included in the program costs.

The Location

San Ramón is situated just outside of the Manuel Brenes forest reserve in the beautiful Central Valley of Costa Rica. About an hour northwest of the capital, San José, San Ramón offers a slow and relaxed lifestyle with a small-town flavor. It's city center has plenty of restaurants and shops and is near the Museo de San Ramón, where you can learn about the important role the city has played in Costa Rica's history.

Academic Calendar

Below is a *tentative* calendar for the fall semester:

Depart U.S.	August 17
Arrival	August 17
Orientation	August 18-19
Courses Begin	August 20
Courses End	December 5
Final Exams	December 6
Move out of housing	December 7

*Dates are subject to change. To see a more detailed program dates: https://usac.edu/study-abroad-programs/costa-rica/San Ramón /calendars

The University

The program is located on the western campus of the Universidad de Costa Rica. UCR in San Ramón is home to over 2,200 students. All USAC classes and the USAC office is located on campus. Wifi and computer labs are available for research and coursework. Students will also have access to the campus laboratories, teaching collections, herbarium, and research collections.

Academics

Additional information on academic topics such as registration, class attendance, credits and course load, grades, transcripts, and accessing the UW-Eau Claire library while abroad is in your Study Abroad Handbook.

Program Prerequisites

To participate in this study abroad program, you must **be in good academic, conduct, and financial, standing, and have the minimum 2.5 GPA required**. The CIE will check grades at the end of the semester prior to departure. If you are on not in good academic, conduct, or financial standing at that time, we will need to check with USAC to see if you will be allowed to participate. If you have been suspended, you will not be allowed to participate on the program. This means that cancellation may happen days before your planned departure date.

Registration in Costa Rica

As part of the USAC admissions process, you are required to submit a preliminary course registration. You will find the Course and Tour Registration Form in your USAC Gateway account. You will complete this form indicating your course and tour selections

along with two alternative courses in case any courses become unavailable. You will submit the completed form directly to USAC.

You will receive your final course schedule during the on-site orientation. Your Resident Director in Costa Rica will make every effort to avoid class conflicts; however, there may be scheduling conflicts and you may need to adjust your class selection. Please be flexible and prepared for course changes.

Add/Drop Courses On Site

You will have 10 class days after the class begins to add/drop courses on site. Written permission is required from both the Resident Director and instructors in order to add/drop/change a course once it has begun.

Withdrawing from USAC Courses

Your Resident Director in Costa Rica will establish a course withdrawal deadline (typically this is about two-thirds of the way into the term). If you must drop a course after the drop deadline, but before the withdrawal deadline, a grade of "W" will be reported on your USAC grade report. If you abandon a class without officially withdrawing from it, a grade will be reported as an "F."

Credits and Course load

You must enroll in a minimum of 12 credits and can take a maximum of 18.

The credits you earn abroad are considered UW-Eau Claire resident credits. The classes you take abroad will count towards the total credits needed for graduation, and **grades will be figured into your UW-Eau Claire GPA.**

Class/Activity Attendance

When studying abroad, you are required to follow the attendance policies of your program abroad. In general, you are expected to attend all regularly scheduled classes and field trips unless illness or other UCRvoidable circumstances make this impossible. Absences must be approved in advance by the instructor and may result in lower grades.

USAC generally allows students one excused absence. Each tardy is considered one half of an absence. If you fail to attend class, this will affect your grade in the course. All exams must be taken as scheduled.

Grades

Courses in the program are graded on the U.S. A-F grading scale. The grades reported on your USAC grade report are the same grades that will appear on your UW-Eau Claire transcript; **grades are included in your UW-Eau Claire GPA.** Pass/Fail grades are not allowed.

Grade Reports

At the end of the program, USAC prepares a grade report, which is sent to UW-Eau Claire. USAC will also update your grades on your Gateway account for you to review. Courses, credits, and grades are incorporated into your UW-Eau Claire transcript.

Grade reports are not available until a few weeks after the summer program. Due to this delay, you will initially receive a grade report with "NR" (not reported) for all courses. The actual courses you took will be reflected on your record once the CIE receives your grade report from USAC.

If you are a senior and are studying abroad for your last term, please note that the different timelines in grade reporting **may require you to delay your graduation from summer to fall**. The UW-Eau Claire Registrar's Office must receive grades within 42 days of the last day of the UW-Eau Claire term in order to confirm your graduation that term. This is a UW-Eau Claire requirement, and our partners abroad cannot change their usual timelines to accommodate it.

Foreign Language Immersion Requirement

If you are a Spanish or LAS major or minor and need to have the fulfillment of your language immersion requirement noted on your degree audit, this program meets the requirement.

The Academic Program

USAC courses at UCR are taught by local and visiting faculty. Professors will provide a syllabus at the beginning of the term and coursework will generally follow a typical U.S. structure with a combination of exams, projects, essays, and/or homework. Your classmates will be other USAC or international students. Local students are already fluent in Spanish and typically their English is not proficient enough to join you in courses taught in English. There will still be plenty of chances for you to interact with local students.

You should plan to be in courses Monday – Friday. You will have plenty of time to explore Costa Rica on weekends. It is not recommended to plan any weekend travel until after you arrive.

The teaching methodology differs from that in the U.S. Computers are used in the classroom when researching assignments only. Homework and written essays are normally completed outside the classroom. Computers are not to be used during a class, or while the professor or invited guests lecture.

The professor's role is to be the classroom facilitator, not the lecturer, as is usually the case in the U.S. **You, as students, are expected to be active participants in the learning process**. If you do not come to class prepared to critically discuss whatever reading has been assigned for that class period, very little will happen in class!

Syllabi may also be different than those used in the U.S. They have much less detail and are far less explicit about exact dates things are due, what percentage each assignment counts toward your grade, etc. Some of your professors have taught or studied in the U.S. system and will use a U.S. style syllabus. Don't expect that from everyone, part of your experience abroad is learning how to operate in a different academic system.

You may also be required to do more independent research than you typically do in the U.S. Doing research will present its own challenges. Again, although you may take some courses in English, don't forget that you are taking them in a Spanish-speaking country. **Ninety five percent of all library resources will, of course, be in Spanish.** Most of your "textbooks" may actually be photocopies of books, due to the high cost and lack of availability of actual books.

Another thing to **keep in mind is the privilege you enjoy in terms of academic resources in the U.S**. and to realize that Costa Rica is a developing country with much less wealth to invest in this area. Library resources are not centralized, as they are in the U.S. In other words, you cannot go to the library, find the book you want listed at another library, and request it through inter-library loan. As explained in the UW-Eau Claire Study Abroad Handbook, you still have access to the UW-Eau Claire library resources. You will also be relying on other resources found on the Internet.

Volunteering

Volunteering during study abroad is a wonderful way to get involved in the local community, make meaningful relationships, and improve your Spanish-language skills.

When considering volunteering during study abroad, it is important to note that it represents both time and commitment to the organization. It requires time on the part of the organization to plan projects for and supervise a volunteer, so please take your commitment seriously or some of the community partners may not be willing to host volunteers in the future. Also, volunteering abroad requires you to take initiative. The more you are willing to invest in the experience the more rewarding it will be!

Volunteer projects will be available based on current need in the community. You will find out about different opportunities once you're in San Ramón .

Service-Learning Requirement

Depending on the volunteer activity, you may be able to fulfill part or all of your UW-Eau Claire service-learning requirement. If you are interested in this option, please contact Courtney Brost at brostcn@uwec.edu, the coordinator for the Costa Rica program, for details.

MONEY MATTERS

Information about how payments are made, when they are due, and the withdrawal/refund deadlines, financial aid, scholarships, budgeting and ways to bring money abroad is in your Study Abroad Handbook.

Cost Estimate

You can find the most current cost estimate for your program, in easily printable format, on the *CIE Costa Rica, San Ramón (USAC) webpage.* Be sure you are looking at the correct term. Remember that the cost estimate includes what you pay to UW-Eau Claire, what you pay to USAC, and what you pay directly to other vendors.

Personal Travel:

The above estimate does not include additional personal travel. How much money you need for travel is always a difficult and personal decision. Keep in mind that you can spend as much money as you have, but you do not need to! Students who spend more time with their host families often have richer interpersonal experiences than those who spend every spare moment traveling.

Currency Exchange

The currency of Costa Rica is the Colon. There are 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100 and 500 colones coins,

and 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000 colones bills. Past participants note that it can be hard to use 10,000 colones bills for small purchases, such as in cafes, in taxis, etc. The exchange rate as of December 20, 2017 was $1 USD = 558 colones. You can find current exchange rates at http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/.

Money Abroad

In addition to the information in the Study Abroad Handbook, past participants report the following about Costa Rica.

ATMs

If using a debit card from the U.S., make sure you understand how much the withdrawal fees are. Also note that there may be an international fee assessed every time you use your card.

When withdrawing money from the ATM, always use caution.

Make sure you notify your bank and credit card companies before your travel. They will want to know your travel itinerary to the best that you have it planned out. Also make a copy of all of your credit cards so that in the event they are lost, stolen, or eaten by an ATM, you have the contact information to call and cancel.

Credit/Debit Cards

If you are going to take a credit card (recommended by past participants as a back-up or for making large purchases), Visa and MasterCard are accepted within Costa Rica; American Express is not. Please note that most stores will not accept credit/debit cards for small purchases. Past participants typically only used credit/debit cards to make online reservations for hostels, etc., instead of using them for everyday purchases.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are increasingly rare and difficult to use. They generally must be cashed at a major bank, although, in some countries, post offices also offer this service, and **you must have your passport with you.** Most banks charge a fee for cashing the checks; it can vary widely. Before cashing a check, ASK what the fee is.

Make sure you record your check numbers and keep the numbers separate from the checks, in case you need to get them replaced.

Health & Safety

Additional information on these issues, as well as information on CISI insurance, is included in the Health Issues and Safety Abroad sections of your Study Abroad Handbook.

Before You Go

In addition to the general health precautions listed in your Study Abroad Handbook, you should consult your physician to see if you should receive any other vaccinations, depending upon the type of travel you plan to do. While there are no required vaccinations for Costa Rica, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does have several recommendations depending on your travel plans and your health history.

Common Health Problems

The most common health problems for U.S. Americans in Costa Rica are intestinal upsets. They usually occur as a result of the change in

diet, the different meal schedule, and organisms unfamiliar to your system.

A very common ailment is traveler's diarrhea. It can largely be avoided by being careful about where and what you eat, and avoiding dairy products if they are not pasteurized. If you do come down with it, the following suggestions will help speed recovery and guide your decision to seek formal care:

1. It will usually run its course in three to five days. The worst symptoms usually occur the first day. Bed rest may help relieve cramps.

2. The main risk of the illness is dehydration. Be sure to maintain fluid intake. An excellent source of fluid replacement is ORS or Oraltye, a prepackaged liquid sold in many countries. If unavailable, the following recipe will provide similar value: one liter carbonated water, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon baking soda (not baking powder), 4 tbsps. sugar.

3. An over-the-counter medicine like Pepto Bismol may help relieve nausea and vomiting.

If nausea and vomiting persist for more than 24 hours, if you develop a fever over 101 degrees F, or if you develop severe abdominal pain, a physician should be contacted immediately.

Water

The water in San Ramón is potable (drinkable). However, if you are traveling outside of San Ramón and buying food from street vendors, and you are in an area where you are not sure that the water is potable, stick to breads or fruits that you peel yourself. Fruits that cannot be peeled, fruit juices diluted with water, raw vegetables, and salads that have not been washed with disinfected water should be avoided.

The general recommendation from the CDC for water is to drink bottled or boiled water any time you are outside of the San José area, where the water is treated. Brush your teeth with bottled or boiled water also. Carbonated bottled water, soft drinks, beer, wine, hot tea, and coffee are usually safe. Be sure to wipe off the top of a bottle before drinking out of it, or ask for a straw ("popote" in Spanish). By making sure that you are drinking uncontaminated water, you can reduce your exposure to many diseases such as infectious hepatitis, cholera, diarrhea and dysentery. Where water is contaminated, ice is also contaminated—you may wish to order drinks "sin hielo" (without ice).

When you are not in control of your water supply or cannot purchase bottled water, consider bringing a portable water purifier, available at most outdoor stores, and boil water vigorously for at least 10 minutes, or use water purification tablets (one tablet per quart of clear water, or two tablets if water is cloudy).

Please see the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommendations on eating and drinking safely in Costa Rica: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/extended_student/costa-rica

Insect Bites

Insect borne diseases, particularly mosquito, such as Zika, malaria and dengue fever, are present in parts of Costa Rica. Discuss malaria prevention with your physician.

Per the CDC, "Dengue fever is the most common cause of fever in travelers returning from the Caribbean, Central America, and South Central Asia. This disease is spread through the bites of infected mosquitoes and cannot be spread person to person."

Severe dengue can be fatal, but with good treatment, less than 1% of patients die from dengue. **See a doctor immediately if you develop dengue symptoms during or after your time abroad:**

Symptoms of dengue include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Pain behind the eyes
- Joint and muscle pain
- Rash
- Nausea/vomiting
- Mild bleeding, such as nose or gum bleeding or easy bruising

As there is no cure for dengue fever, the best prevention in all cases for insect bites is using a good repellent (with DEET) and wearing appropriate clothing. Depending on activity, loose, long-sleeved shirts and pants are good choices. For more protection, clothing may be sprayed with a repellent containing permethrin. (Don't use permethrin on skin.)

Zika Virus

The CDC does warn that there is a risk for the Zika virus in Costa Rica. The Zika infection, in pregnant women, can cause serious birth defects so the CDC does not recommend travel to Costa Rica for women who are pregnant. All travelers should strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites. If you have concerns over this, please consult with your doctor.

Health Facilities in Costa Rica

If you need health care while in San Ramón , there are local medical facilities with different levels of service. The USAC staff in San Ramón or your host families will direct you to the appropriate one if you do get sick. Be aware you'll have to pay up front, and then CISI insurance will reimburse you. See the Study Abroad Handbook for more information about CISI.

Emergency Contacts

General emergency procedures are described in the Study Abroad Handbook, and the USAC staff is available if difficulties arise. You will receive an emergency contact card with USAC staff information at the orientation 2 meeting; be sure to keep it in your wallet at all times. The information is also on the Contact Names & Addresses page of this guide.

Safety in Costa Rica

During orientation in Costa Rica, you will hear about specific places and behaviors to avoid, particularly in San José. For example, the Coca-Cola bus station in downtown San José is not a place to hang around: if you need to transfer through to catch a bus, go in a group, and time your arrival very close to your

departure. While there, keep all bags in your hands.

****NOTE:** Both men and women should be aware of their safety at all times. In the past, men have been just as susceptible as women to potential risks. As U.S. Americans, you may stick out as "foreigners". The best advice is to be aware of your surroundings, listen to your instincts, and use your common sense.

For specific information on crime and road safety in Costa Rica, see the U.S. State Department Information for Costa Rica on our website (found under Current Participants, term/year of your program.)

If you are the victim of a crime or if you are arrested abroad, get in touch with the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy. U.S. consular offices will do what they can to help U.S. citizens in serious legal, medical, or financial difficulties. They can often direct you to a reliable doctor or clinic, help you contact family, or re-issue your passport.

Marijuana and other Illegal Drugs

Please note that the use of marijuana is illegal in Costa Rica. Even carrying it on your person can be considered drug trafficking. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Costa Rica are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. U.S. citizenship offers no protection if you break a Costa Rican law. There is NOTHING the CIE, USAC, or the U.S. government can do if you are found in violation of Costa Rican laws.

In addition to legal penalties, you are putting yourself at risk any time you buy a drug from a stranger. You may be in danger of robbery or assault, or you may get a much more dangerous combination of drugs than you thought you were buying.

911 Equivalent in Costa Rica

Just like in the U.S., Costa Rica uses 911 for local police, fire, or ambulance services.

The U.S. State Department also provides a list of 911 numbers abroad. Please note that in some countries there are different numbers for fire, police, and ambulance. Plan ahead and research numbers before you go.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Passport information is included in your Study Abroad Handbook.

Visa

A visa is official permission to temporarily reside in another country and is granted by the government of that country. The CIE will post basic information about the current visa options for U.S. citizens for study in Costa Rica to the Learning Content section of your online study abroad account during the semester prior to departure. USAC will also post visa information to your Gateway account. **However, it is your responsibility to keep up-to-date about student visa requirements for Costa Rica, and if required, to apply for and receive a visa from an Costa Rican consulate or embassy in a timely manner.** Please read the "Visa" section of your Study Abroad Handbook for

more information about what you should do to keep up-to-date on visa requirements.

Packing Tips

In addition to the general packing information in your Study Abroad Handbook, you should know the following about Costa Rica.

Weather

You will be in Costa Rica during the rainy season. The climate in August through December will be mostly warm and humid in the mornings and afternoons, but with strong possibility of rain on most afternoons and in some mornings. Due to the higher elevation, it may be cold/cooler in the evenings than you expect.

Packing Less is More

When packing your bags for Costa Rica, please keep in mind that it is vital that you pack light, less stuff is easier to carry and less costly.

Students in the past have found that they have brought with them too many unnecessary items and too much clothing. Bringing along too many pairs of shoes, clothes for evening events, formal attire, etc. is not a good idea. Most of the clothes you will be wearing in Costa Rica will be casual: summer outfits, such as t-shirts and shorts, cargo pants, skirts and informal blouses.

Clothing

In the area of clothing, anything goes. Costa Rican female students are more likely to wear jeans or skirts (often quite short skirts) than shorts or dresses, and usually wear them with dressier shoes than U.S. women might. Cotton t-shirts/sweatshirts with logos are less common than on a U.S. campus, particularly among women, but can be seen.

Gifts

You may want to pack some small items that you could use as gifts. It is suggested, but not obligatory, to offer a small gift for your host-family. A small memento from Wisconsin, like a UWEC mug, might be nice. If you are unsure what to bring for your host family, ask your peer advisor.

What to Pack

Your Peer Adviser will give you a suggested packing list at your orientation 2 meeting.

Do Not Bring

Do not bring expensive cell phones, jewelry, or other luxury items that can be lost or stolen. If you do decide to bring items that are expensive to replace, you may want to consider personal property insurance for your time in Costa Rica.

Appliances

Costa Rica uses the same electric current as the U.S.

Forget something? San Ramón has pharmacies, super markets and mini-markets available.

Arrival/Departure

There is information on student-oriented travel agencies, instructions for booking a flight, and other travel information in the Study Abroad Handbook.

Travel Arrangements

It is your responsibility to make and pay for travel arrangements to Costa Rica. Airline tickets are not included in your USAC program fees. An optional group flight is available for this program through a travel agency recommended by USAC. If you choose not to book the group flight, you will need to book your own flight and arrive prior to the mandatory orientation.

USAC Group Flight

Benefits to booking with the optional group flight:

- Flexible tickets that are refundable and changeable for a fee
- Select the group return date or select your own date for the same price
- Frosch Student Travel can help book connecting flights to merge with the group flight departure cities for a reasonable amount.
- Flexible payment plan (pay a deposit to hold your seat, then pay the balance 2 weeks prior to departure)
- Airport pick-up in USAC (there is no USAC staff to chaperone the flight, but group flight participants will be met at the airport by USAC staff, unless you arrive late).

USAC will be in contact with you and information will be on your USAC Gateway account on how to sign up for the group flight.

Early Arrivals

USAC strongly discourages students from arriving early. If you decide to arrive early, you will need to find and pay for your own accommodations. You should not expect to have much or any assistance upon arrival, and should be prepared to deal with any issues on your own.

Airport Pick-Up Service

There is only one airport pick-up service and it is tailored for students arriving on the group flight.

Students not on the group flight are responsible for arranging and paying for their transfer from the airport to San Ramón. Instructions on how to do this will be provided in your Gateway account approximately one month before the program start date.

Students not on the group flight may be able to take advantage of the group transportation pending approval by their USAC Program Advisor. Students will find out if they've been approved for the group pick up approximately one week before the program start date. If the request has been denied, you will be responsible for paying and arranging your own transportation to San Ramón.

Note: All students must complete the Flight Form in your Gateway account after you've booked your flight.

Clearing Immigration & Customs

Flight attendants will give out two different kinds of forms that need to be filled out, a form with your personal information and another form is the Costa Rica Customs Declaration form. **You do not need to declare anything because you will only be bringing items for personal use.**

You will receive a tourist visa upon exiting your flight in Costa Rica. USAC will take you

to change your tourist visa to the visa de estancia.

There is a short walk from your arriving gate to the immigration lines. You should be able to get through the line fairly quickly. You will get in line to have your passport stamped, and the first form is collected at that point. The estimated time for clearing immigration is about 20 minutes, but unexpected delays tend to happen.

After clearing immigration and picking up your luggage, you will head to the exit (street level), which is in the same main area of the airport. (San Jose's airport is very small, so do not worry about getting lost!)

As you walk out to the exit, you will have the choice of going either to the right or to the left; please go to your LEFT. Immediately outside you'll find a lot of people waiting: people offering taxi services, holding signs with people's names and just a general bit of confusion. **You should watch for people wearing USAC shirts and holding a USAC sign or flag.**

Late Arrivals-Expected and Unexpected

If you do not arrive as scheduled for any reason, you will be responsible for arranging and paying for your transfer from the airport. There will be a detailed Arrival Guide posted to your Gateway account about a month prior to the program start with instructions for late arrivals.

IMPORTANT REMINDER: If you don´t feel comfortable communicating well in Spanish, write down your host family's address on a piece of paper and give it to the airport driver.

Leaving Costa Rica

A return airport transfer is included in the program cost if you leave on the official program end date and within a few hours of the return group flight. If you are not flying back on or around the same time as the group flight, you will be responsible for arranging and paying for your own transportation at the end of the program.

If you decide to stay in Costa Rica longer than the official program end date, it is your responsibility to make arrangements to get to your airport of departure and to pay for the cost of whatever type of transportation you use. Neither your host family or USAC staff are obliged to take you to the airport.

Settling In

Orientation

When you first arrive in Costa Rica, you will be taken to your host family's house. The next day will be the mandatory orientation where topics will include: living with host families, cultural differences, appropriate behavior, Costa Rica in general, and safety & emergency procedures. This is also a great chance to get to know the USAC staff.

Homestays

To encourage the maximum use of newly acquired Spanish language skills, all students live with Spanish-speaking families in San Ramón . USAC arranges accommodations with carefully selected host families. In general, only one student is placed per family; in all

cases, you will have your own room. The cost of room and three meals a day is included in the cost of your program.

Information about your family (name, address, house telephone [or cell phone], email, ages of family members) will be sent to you about a week before you arrive in Costa Rica. You may want to **contact your family via email or social media, or call them,** after you receive the information in order to introduce yourself a bit.

Financial Arrangements

While USAC screens families carefully to try to ensure that they have cultural interests for participating, **most** households participating do so at least partially for economic reasons. This is only logical, given the disruption that hosting a student causes to family life.

Even for families with cultural reasons for participating, it is not easy to welcome a stranger into your home for the summer. The entire family needs to adjust schedules and habits to accommodate a new person. In addition, there are very real costs associated with having another person in the home. Receiving some monetary compensation for this is only fair, and most families would not consider hosting otherwise.

If you stay after the program ends and want to remain at your host family's house, you **must pay** your family for room and board. In some cases the family truly needs that income, in others the family may be in a position to charge you less than they normally do. **In all cases**, you should not expect your host family to provide room and board for free. The families need your contribution in order to take care of you.

Keep in mind, that any relationship is a two-way street. It is as much your responsibility to fit into the family as it is their responsibility to include you in their daily life. A few pointers that may help you to fit in more easily:

The House

In the words of a past participant, *"My house was pretty typical. There was a family room, eating room, and kitchen downstairs, then the upstairs had three bedrooms. My room had a twin bed, closet, mirror, and a desk to do homework. I brought pictures of friends and family from home and set those up in my room, which gave it a personal touch to feel like my home".*

"Your" Room

You will have your own room; however, the concept of a private room is different in Costa Rica than in the U.S. A messy room reflects poorly on you and your upbringing. In addition, it will reflect poorly on your host family, as the messy room is part of their house. Keep your room neat, make your bed every day before leaving home, and you will avoid tensions that could otherwise arise. Just closing the door is not acceptable. In addition, be aware that **it is never proper to entertain guests, regardless of their gender, in your bedroom.**

Please do not keep snacks of any kind in your bedroom. Students sometimes complain of ants and roaches, often this is because sweets or other foods have been left open in their rooms.

Guests

You should only invite visitors to your house if you have first cleared this with your host family. Visitors should never be invited for meals or to stay overnight without prior family permission.

If you are expecting friends or family members from the States, make lodging arrangements for them at a local hostel, apartment or hotel prior to their arrival in Costa Rica. The host family should not be expected to have additional visitors stay in their homes, even for just a few days.

Even if a host family offers to allow a visitor to stay in their home for a night or two, they will appreciate a monetary contribution of at least $20 per day per person. Please be aware that it is not culturally appropriate for you to have your boyfriend or girlfriend spend the night in your room in your host family's house.

Telephone

Telephone rates are very high in Costa Rica, and every call, local or long distance, is charged by the minute. Some families forbid the use of the telephone, and all prefer that students use a pay phone rather than the phone at home. See the "Communication" section of this guide for details.

Water

Water is a precious resource in Costa Rica. Most Costa Ricans take a shower every morning, and you can, too—but it should be short, both to conserve water and to keep the bathroom as free as possible. Hot water is not always guaranteed! If you can't figure out how to use the hot water, just ask! Water from your host families' homes is safe to drink.

Toilets

In Costa Rica, as in many parts of Central and South America, you can't flush toilet paper down the toilet. Plumbing pipes are typically only one inch in diameter, rather than the standard two inches used in the U.S. There will be a garbage can next to the toilet to be used for toilet paper. **Make sure to throw toilet paper in the garbage can, not in the toilet!** This takes some getting used to, but after a few weeks, it will become habit.

Laundry

Laundry will be done by your family. Discuss with them the family laundry schedule. **Note that females may have to wash their own underwear.**

Meals

You will be eating typical Costa Rican foods with your host family. Expect lots of beans and rice, fresh fruits and vegetables, and a variety of chicken and red meat. The food is not spicy. Unless you have an actual food allergy, it is only polite to try whatever you are offered. Do not expect your family to prepare special meals for you—remember that you should expect to be treated as part of the family, not a special guest.

A few standards that you will encounter:

Gallo pinto: rice and black beans seasoned with cilantro, onions, and peppers; typically served for breakfast.
Arroz con pollo: rice with chicken, usually some vegetables and different seasonings.

Arroz con leche: a typical dessert made from rice and milk.
Refrescos: a type of juice made from fresh fruit, sugar, and water or milk.

Meals are considered family time. Some U.S. students are in the habit of taking their meals to their rooms at home; this is not acceptable behavior in Costa Rica. Also, if you are going to miss a meal for any reason, please be sure to let your host mother know well in advance.

The Refrigerator

Typically, families encourage you to eat when you are hungry. However, the fridge and cabinets are not stocked with snacks and food like in the United States. Families typically purchase the food they will prepare each day. It's better not to help yourself to snacks, but politely ask beforehand.

Keep Lines of Communication Open

If you have questions about what your family expects of you, or you feel they do not understand your behavior, talk with them! Open lines of communication are important in building trust in any relationship.

Checking In

Costa Rican parents are generally more protective, even of university-age students, than their U.S. counterparts. This may feel intrusive to you, particularly if you have been living on your own for a while. Remember that this is a cultural adjustment and respect your host family's wishes. Let them know if you are going out, particularly in the evening, where you are going, with whom, and what time you will be back. Be aware that they will most likely not go to sleep until you have returned. If they ask that you be back by a particular time, be sure that you are. If you will be gone overnight, be sure to inform your family well in advance.

Visiting Your Host Family After the Program Ends

Many students establish very strong bonds with their host families and end up going back to visit after the program has finished. It is perfectly acceptable to go back and visit your family, but we ask you to plan your visit when a UW-Eau Claire program is not in session. Your family may be hosting another student, and it puts them in an uncomfortable situation.

COMMUNICATION

Information on accessing/forwarding your UW-Eau Claire email address, which you need to check while abroad, is in your Study Abroad Handbook.

Telephone Information

As mentioned previously, phone calls are very expensive in Costa Rica. The telephone is primarily used briefly to set up times/places for meeting with friends. If you find it absolutely necessary to use a phone at home, and your family approves, **limit yourself to ONE 3-minute call per day.**

Never make a long-distance call from your host family's home unless you make it COLLECT. Ask someone in the family to help you do this. Long distance calls are often not billed until two months later, and the bills may not be itemized. It is therefore not practical or polite to offer to pay for a long-distance call.

Past participants note that it is easy to Skype from Internet cafes, and, apart from the Internet charge, it is free.

It will be easier for you to call home than for your parents to call you at first. However, once you get situated, it is cheaper for your parents and friends to call you. You may want to set a specific time and day so that you are by the phone.

To call from the U.S. to Costa Rica: you must first dial 011, which is the international dialing code. Next, you must dial 506 to get Costa Rica, and then the rest of the number to reach a specific city and location.

Internet

Internet is a great resource and the program uses it for regular communication with the students as well as for academic research; nonetheless, patience is required as the service is not as reliable as it is in the U.S. You should exercise all precautions when saving your work, as problems with electricity, Internet failure and others can render the product of your effort "disappeared" in seconds. Bring a flash drive with you for backing up your school work. Send yourself a message with your work attached, just to have it in a safe place. You might also want to send it to a friend of yours or to a second address of your own.

Wi-Fi is available on-campus as well as in many restaurants and cafes off-campus. Your host family will also have internet, but be aware that it may be slower than what you are used to or it may go out from time to time.

Keep in mind that Internet cafés in Costa Rica are not the same as in the states. You mostly have to use the café's computers, and they are typically not a sit-down-and-drink-coffee café where you can use your laptop with wireless.

Please be sure to not 'over-use' the Internet! Don't forget that you are in Costa Rica, and it is important to experience what is in front of you!!!

CULTURAL NOTES

Greetings and Addresses

Observe proper greeting and leaving etiquette. Always shake hands when you meet an acquaintance. It is also acceptable for women to kiss friends (men and women) on the cheek; men shake hands. Using titles and addressing people with the "Usted" form is considered polite.

Tico Time

Former students have reported that the concept of time in Costa Rica is different than in the U.S. While buses and tourism agencies are usually very punctual and dependable, departure and returning hours might change due to unexpected circumstances. Traditionally, Ticos tend to be more relaxed about the concept of time and are not driven by the belief that "time is money." This laid-back attitude has become known as "Tico Time."

There is a sense that what you are doing at the present is important, particularly if you are spending time with a person, and that things planned for later will be taken care of later. In Costa Rica, it is not uncommon for a friend to

show up a half hour after an agreed-upon meeting time, or for a party to begin two hours later than announced. It would be considered rude to arrive on time if invited to a friend's house for dinner. Relax and try a new style.

Note: The more relaxed time concept **does not apply** in academic situations, such as class or a meeting with a professor. In these situations and other more formal business settings, punctuality is expected.

"Developing World"

Part of U.S. students' frustration with time and schedules in Costa Rica may be that, on the surface, Costa Rica can seem similar to the U.S. There is a McDonald's, Ace Hardware, the Gap, Subway, and TCBY in San José. The glaring poverty in many Central American countries is less evident in Costa Rica. People are generally well-educated; the buses are clean and new-looking, and there are ATMs and phone booths in many locations.

Despite the outward appearance of relative wealth, however, Costa Rica is a developing country. You may become frustrated when the ATM doesn't work, and when you are forced to stand in line at the bank for two hours to complete a transaction that takes three minutes at home. Keep in mind that this is all part of truly experiencing life in a different culture.

Family

The family plays an important role in Costa Rican culture. The extended family is often a very large, close circle of relatives and friends. It is not unusual for children to live with parents until they marry, or to continue to live with parents if they never marry. Your host family may include several generations in one house.

Traditional family roles, although not as pronounced as in the past, are still apparent to a U.S. observer. The man is still the authority figure and main provider, while the woman, even if she works outside the home, is usually responsible for running the household and caring for the children.

Gender Issues

Women in Costa Rica have made great gains toward equality. They make up 50% of the student body at all educational levels up to the university and are better represented in professional roles than in most other Latin American countries.

Despite the above paragraph, as you interact with Costa Ricans your age, you may become aware that social rules and etiquette are stricter for women than for men. A woman's reputation is important. You may notice that Costa Rican women rarely drink very much, and they almost never go to clubs or bars alone.

U.S. females are stereotyped as being "easy," so flirting openly with local men may send out the wrong signals to them – you could be seen as an easy sexual conquest. You would want to avoid this stereotype. Remember you are an ambassador of your country and of your university while studying abroad.

"Piropos"

Piropos (catcalls) are a fact of life for women in Costa Rica. Although they may be considered "harmless" at one level, they often do not feel that way to U.S. American women. The best way to deal with piropos is to just ignore them and continue on your way.

Other Notes

- Pedestrians never have the right of way—be careful when crossing the street!

- Visiting students usually notice that there are no pollution controls for vehicles, buses, industry, etc. With the advent of eco-tourism, Costa Rica is becoming more environmentally conscious.

- Be sure to agree on a price before you get into a cab, or you may be charged a high rate. Also ask if the driver has a taxi meter (known as a Maria)—if not, look for another taxi, as the rate could be set arbitrarily.

TRAVEL WHILE ABROAD

Program Excursions

USAC plans some excursions that are included in the program cost. You should not ask to stay longer at certain places, or to have the bus driver come back and get members of your group later, because you want to spend some more "free time" exploring. The trips are carefully planned and budgeted for by the USAC Resident Director, and if you want to go back to visit an area, that is great, but you should plan to do so during a free weekend.

Optional Excursions

USAC also plans optional tours and field studies at an additional cost. You can select these options on the Course & Tour Registration Form you filled out as part of your USAC application.

Guidebooks

If you are like many students, you may want to travel around a bit on your own. To make the most of this, you'll want to do some advance planning. Travel guides such as Lonely Planet receive good comments from past participants and are available at any major bookstore. Some guides are written specifically for economy travelers. Christopher Baker's Costa Rica Handbook has lots of good information, also.

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General UW-Eau Claire & CISI contact information is in your Study Abroad Handbook.

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WEB RESOURCES: COSTA RICA		
COSTA RICA	CULTURE	TRAVEL
San Isidro de San Ramón http://www.govisitcostarica.com/region/city.asp?cID=220	**Spanish Language** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_language	**Costa Rica by Bus** http://www.lonelyplanet.com/costa-rica/transport/getting-around/bus
Visit Costa Rica http://www.visitcostarica.com	**Constitution of Costa Rica** http://www.costaricalaw.com/Constitutional-Law/costa-rica-constitution-in-english.html	**Newspapers** http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/costaric.htm
Costa Rica—Traveler Reviews on Trip Advisor http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g291982-Costa_Rica-Vacations.html	**Political Resources: Costa Rica** http://www.politicalresources.net/costa.htm	**La Nación** http://www.nacion.com/
About Costa Rica http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costa_Rica		**Tico Times** http://www.ticotimes.net/

WHAT PAST PARTICIPANTS HAVE SAID ABOUT THEIR TIME IN COSTA RICA

"It was everything I hoped it would be and more. It changed my life and I learned so much about other cultures, as well as the Spanish language and myself. I will never forget my time abroad." -Trey, Spring 2015

"My experience in Costa Rica has been life changing. I am so proud to be able to say that I am now bilingual! I have seen so many beautiful places--rain forests, beaches, crater lakes, waterfalls, mountains and so much more. My life has been changed for the better because of my new knowledge of a different culture. I now have a second home country: Costa Rica." -Ellie, Spring 2015

"I have gained so much confidence and I've learned so much about myself. This semester abroad is honestly one of the best decisions I have ever made. I'm so happy to have a family in another country. Although studying abroad seems like the scariest thing you can ever do, it's honestly the best thing. It's opened my eyes to a bigger world and other cultures." -Jesse, Spring 2015

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Updated 12/21/2017 cnb