

¡SALUDOS DESDE COSTA RICA!

We are very happy that you have decided to study Spanish with us in Costa Rica and we look forward to your arrival! To help you prepare your stay, the following are tips regarding items to bring, the homestay, general cultural issues, safety, communication, health, transportation, and arrival schedule.

1. ARRIVAL DAY

After arriving at the San José airport and disembarking the plane, you proceed to immigration (Visitors section) to get your passport stamped. Then you pick up your luggage and continue on to customs (where you may or may not have your bag opened), putting your bag on a large conveyor belt. After customs, you exit the main building of the airport. A CPI staff member will be waiting for you at the exit with a sign that says CPI. Upon arrival you are given a package with additional information about Costa Rica.

In the event that your flight is delayed or you cannot find the CPI representative, there are public phones as you exit the main doors of the airport. You may reach a CPI staff member, at the following number: (506) 8827-1406.

2. THINGS TO BRING

The following suggestions are compiled from many years of student feedback.

a) Heredia

- Climate

Heredia averages 80F year round with night time temperatures around 70F.

- Clothing

Bring a light jacket or sweater for the evening, comfortable walking shoes, cotton pants, shorts, collared shirts or t-shirts. Casual wear is typical and men do not need a tie. You may want to bring one nice outfit for a night out, in some discos you cannot enter with sneakers and t shirts.

b) Monteverde area

- Climate

Monteverde/San Luis averages 70F to 75F. The dry season is typically warm, dry with some dust along the unpaved roads. Some roads in Monteverde are rocky and muddy during the green season.

- Clothing

In Monteverde it is best to dress in layers due to warm mornings and possibly rainy afternoons. Bring t-shirts that can be worn under long sleeved button downs, cotton pants, a few pairs of shorts, a jacket, warm socks and warm pajamas. **Nights are much cooler, so we recommend that you bring a sweatshirt or sweater.**

c) Coast (Manuel Antonio)

- Climate

Flamingo averages 85F to 90F.

- Clothing

Summer attire is recommended. Coastal towns are more relaxed atmosphere and casual wear is more common than in other parts of the country (i.e. shorts, sandals and tank tops). Do not forget insect repellent, your swimsuit and sun screen!

d) Notes on Clothing

- Clothing can be purchased in Costa Rica. However, it is usually more expensive than in North America.
- Women find that the clothing they wear strongly influence how they are treated on the street. Short or skimpy shorts, tight clothing or dressing without a bra may evoke rude comments and even aggressive behavior from some men.
- Both sexes wear shorts in the city, but to a lesser extent than in the U.S. and shorts are not worn in the evening.

e) Additional Items

- Useful items to bring include: a small flashlight, pocket alarm clock, walking shoes, bathing suit, binoculars, camera (and film), insect repellent, sun screen, sun glasses, pocket knife and a change purse for coins.
- It is important to bring both a beach towel and a bath towel (your host family does not provide you with a towel).
- While most toiletries can be purchased in the pharmacies in Costa Rica, imported items are heavily taxed making them more expensive. Prescription drugs should be brought with you. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, it is best to bring along an extra pair.
- Costa Rica uses the 110 voltage system so you do not need adaptors for your electrical appliances if you are from the USA.
- Bring a notebook and a Spanish/English dictionary or Spanish/and other language. C.P.I. provides various handouts on different grammar points, so you may want to bring a binder to organize handouts. The book “501 Spanish verbs” and/or another favorite grammar book would be helpful resources.

f) Money

If you are going to change some money up at the airport before arriving then we recommend that you exchange a small amount (\$30-\$50) which will cover your expenses for your first weekend in Costa Rica. On the first Monday, after your arrival, you will be able to exchange money in any of the banks in the area.

It is preferable to bring use smaller \$USD notes for example \$20USD or under as many places will not accept \$100 or \$50. Furthermore we do not recommend bringing large amounts of cash. It is better to bring a combination of cash and a credit card.

- Credit / Debit Cards

Before you leave your home country, please inform your bank and/or credit card company that you are traveling abroad. That way, when charges from Costa Rica start showing up on your bank statement they do not assume your card has been stolen.

Visa and Master Card credit cards are accepted in many places but Discover and American Express are much less so. Large banks give cash advances on Visa cards throughout Costa Rica; private banks in large cities give cash advances on Master Card. There are ATMs in Heredia and Monteverde that accept all types of credit cards.

- Banks

There are banks in San Joaquín de Flores (CPI Heredia), the Monteverde area and Manuel Antonio areas. The currency of Costa Rica is the colón but \$USD (smaller bills) are also accepted in most places.

- Traveler's checks

USD\$ traveler's checks are widely accepted and safe for travel. However whilst these are one of the safest ways to get your money you will not be able to use them in places like restaurants, supermarkets etc.

NOTE: Make photocopies of all important documents, such as: your passport (showing photograph and entrance stamp), airline ticket, credit cards, insurance policy and driver's

license. Carry the photocopies with you and leave the originals in your homestay. If this is not possible, carry the originals with you in a secure, inside pocket.

Please note that there is a \$28 airport exit tax when you exit Costa Rica.

3. HOMESTAY

a) General

Your Tico family strives to make you feel as comfortable as possible. All of the homestays are carefully screened and visited periodically to ensure a positive homestay experience for the student. The homestays vary in make-up from young couples, to families with young children, to middle aged and retired couples.

Socializing with your family and asking questions is a great way to learn about Costa Rican culture. Please keep in mind that families typically spend leisure time visiting relatives, engaging in community activities (such as, going to church, to local fairs, etc.) or being at home; this is how most of your quality time is spent with the family. You have a private room to sleep, study or just relax. The bathroom and living quarters are shared with the family.

b) Food

The family prepares a light breakfast and a dinner for you each day. You can expect to be served “comida típica”, or typical dishes, which rely heavily on rice and beans, the basis of many Costa Rican meals. “Gallo pinto”, the national dish of fried rice and black beans is very common, particularly for breakfast. Other popular dishes are “arroz con pollo” (rice and chicken) or “arroz con mariscos” (rice and seafood). If you wish, you may purchase additional foods and make use of the family’s refrigerator. There are supermarkets in San Joaquín and Heredia. We are often asked whether it is safe to drink the water, yes, it is.

If you have special dietary requests or needs (i.e. vegetarian or low fat, food allergies), please inform the school so we may work with the family to meet your needs. If your dietary needs are very specific (e.g. due to a medical condition) it may be necessary for you to bring your own food.

c) Gifts

It is not necessary to bring a gift for your family; however, it is a thoughtful gesture. Some popular gifts include: any item that represents your hometown or culture, kitchen items (placemats, towel sets), note cards, candy, small toys for children in the family, books in Spanish, a picture book from your hometown/state/province, popular music, artwork from your area, etc. Host moms love scented body products like lotions, creams and bath gels.

d) Host family expectations of host student

We do ask that students be aware of the primary cultural differences and expectations of the host families when housing a foreign student:

As Costa Rica is an early to bed/early to rise society, we ask that adult students do not stay out past 12:00/1:00 a.m. If a student does stay out late, s/he should come into the house quietly so as not to disturb family members (students are given a set of keys).

Students should bring their own toiletries and personal items (i.e. towels, soap, shampoo)

Students should keep their rooms orderly; the host family cleans the room, changes the sheets and provides laundry service for dirty clothes.

Smoking should be outside of the house only.

Overnight guests and the consumption of drugs is absolutely forbidden and result in the student losing their homestay privilege.

e) Most common cultural challenges faced by students

Standard of living – more basic compared to the US with smaller common, living spaces

More contact with nature – bugs, in particular, are more commonly seen since we are located in the tropics. That does not necessarily indicate a lack of cleanliness.

Addresses- Costa Rica utilizes landscape/landmark references as there are no street names or signs.

Family customs, rules and religious traditions – for example, it is the norm for unmarried children to live at home until married. North American students find it odd to see a 30 year old living with his/her parents. In Costa Rica it would be perceived as strange to live on your own.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

a) Phone

If you live in the United States, you may bring phone cards, such as: MCI, AT&T, or Sprint and use them within Costa Rica to call any place in the world.

With unblocked US cell phones it is also possible to purchase a local Costa Rican chip for phone use at a fairly reasonable rate.

An alternate option is a company in the USA through which you can rent cellular phones specific for use in Costa Rica. This company, Costa Rica Cellular Connection will send a phone to your house before you leave. Once you arrive in Costa Rica, you activate the phone and will be able to stay in touch with family and friends wherever you go. Costa Rica Cellular Connection offers special rates for CPI students. For more information reference their web link on www.costaricacellularconnection.com

Internet

In Costa Rica we have high speed internet available throughout the country (although it tends not to be as fast as what you are accustomed to in the US) and at each of the CPI schools there is wireless internet service that students can use. Additionally there are a limited number of computers available in the libraries of the school during library hours, which is usually in the afternoons.

5. HEALTH

Immunizations are not mandatory for entrance into Costa Rica. However, it is best to consult with your doctor as physicians tend to recommend that travelers receive immunizations for Hepatitis A and B.

If you become ill while in Costa Rica, the cost of medical treatment typically runs between \$70-\$100 per doctor visit. The school can assist you with making doctor appointments, if necessary.

6. CPI ADRESSES

Costa Ricans use reference points, landmarks, and meters (one block, more or less, is the equivalent of 100 meters) instead of street names and numbers when giving directions.

For example, CPI Heredia is: 150 metros al este del cementerio de San Joaquín de Flores, Heredia, Costa Rica.

7. CPI RULES AND PROCEDURES

This information is given to avoid any misunderstandings and as a means of protecting your rights. If you have any questions regarding the following policies, please do not hesitate to make an inquiry in the office.

a) Program Refunds

- C.P.I. does not under any circumstance give cash refunds in the case where the student does not finish the program or any part of the program for which they have registered (unless the student must return to their home country for an emergency situation in which case proof of an emergency must be provided to receive an 80% refund).
- If the student is unable to finish the program for which they have registered they will be given a credit, which must be used within a period of one year. This credit is not transferable to another person.

b) Homestays

- It is prohibited to have a late night or overnight guests; disregard of this may incur forfeit of homestay privileges.
- Under no circumstances may the students remain in the homestay after classes terminate. Absolutely no private contracts may be arranged between students and host-families as the families are under contractual agreement with C.P.I.
- In the event that it is necessary, CPI can move the student to another family. If a student does not want to stay with another homestay family, CPI does not give refunds or pay for other accommodations.

c) Classes

- Coming to class while intoxicated will result in immediate suspension of classes. It is disrespectful to the professors as well as other classmates, and cannot be tolerated.
- The CPI methodology is specifically designed toward weekly linguistic advancement, with each class geared toward covering a predetermined number of grammatical points and the achievement of conversational goals. As a result, punctuality, active class participation and the completion of homework assignments are all essential elements to meeting the program goals.
- If the student wishes to change class groups at CPI, the student should make such a request known to either to the academic or student coordinator. Both the professor's opinion as well as the academic coordinator's class observations will be taken into account when considering whether a group change is necessary. Should the academic coordinator deem the change necessary, the student will begin classes in a different group the following week. The student should request a group change no later than Wednesday.
- The academic coordinator has the obligation to supervise and observe the classes at least once a week and may ask your professor for the class lesson plan. The student should continue in the class naturally, as such quality control has been added to improve our programs. Additionally, it enables the academic coordinator to analyze in detail the performance of the professors and their students.

Thank you for your time for reading this important information. We look forward to seeing you in Costa Rica!
