



ULACIT
#1 PRIVATE
UNIVERSITY
IN CENTRAL AMERICA
FOR 7 CONSECUTIVE
YEARS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK



ABOUT ULACIT

ULACT is a bilingual private university in Costa Rica that began to operate in 1987. It grew out of a technical school that was established in 1936 and now offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in the Schools of Engineering, Information and Communication Technologies, Film and Animation, Art and Design, Business Administration, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences. We are located in the capital city, just a 5 minute walk from San José downtown. The university has ranked as #1 private university in Costa Rica by the QS World University Rankings for eight years in a row.

ULACIT uses project-based learning methodologies. We do not use exams like traditional universities do. Our project-based learning is founded on inquiry, research, problem solving, and service, based on the Teaching for Understanding (TfU) framework developed by Harvard's Project Zero. Our university has also an Americanized curriculum, with aspects like Freshman Seminar, First-Year Experience, and Gen-Ed (general studies, or liberal arts). We are the only Costa Rican institution that is a member of the National Student Affairs Association in the US. ULACIT also offers a wide range of student services: medical, dental, and nutritional services; academic, vocational, and psychological counseling; job placement; international exchanges.

Due to our service-learning programs that contribute to the community as well as the possibility that students have of taking 50% of their learning requirements abroad, we train leaders to serve the world.





STUDENT LIFE

ULACIT Student Clubs promote student leadership, creativity and global understanding by interacting and learning from other students through their calendar of events and activities which we make available for all international students as well.

Our clubs organize different cultural, artistic, recreational, social and informational events and activities where both local and visiting international students develop a general awareness of the reality of the country and the world. The international students are welcome to participate in all of the conferences, workshops, sports and recreational events which are related to the club that hosts them.

Green Club: promotion of environmental awareness and environmental conservation practices both within and outside the university. Campaigns, educational workshops and field work activities.

Civic House Club: encouragement of social inclusion, and fulfillment of the civic duty of solidarity through strategic volunteering actions.

Arts Club: promotion of the development of the different visual art manifestations such as dancing, singing, drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, design, and other areas with the purpose of motivating the artistic sensitivity and the development of expression skills of students.

Sports Club: opportunities for playing sports and participating in recreational activities promoting physical and mental health. Tournaments, competitions, gatherings and rides.

Diversity Club: It organizes lectures, workshops, political and social activities, always under the principles of respect and appreciation of diversity.

Tech Club: It contributes to the abilities development and interests in the fields of the science, technology and innovation.

Debate Club: It creates spaces to analyze topics of public interest from different ideological positions.

For more information on the calendar of events and activities in ULACIT Student Life agenda please contact José Rojas, Director of Student Leadership, at vrojas@ulacit.ac.cr



BEFORE ARRIVING TO COSTA RICA

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

These are the most important documents that you must have with you during your time abroad. They validate your citizenship and verify your legal status while in Costa Rica. We recommend you keep these documents in a secure location both during travel and throughout your stay. Be sure to make photocopies/scans of all relevant documents (passport, entry stamp, visa, etc.) and keep a copy in your possession at all times. We recommend that you also provide a copy of these documents to your parents or guardians back home.

Johanne Bergman, University of Agder, Norway.



PASSPORTS

A valid passport and a roundtrip air ticket are required for all persons entering Costa Rica. Additionally, passports must not expire within 6 months from your date of arrival and be in good condition; Costa Rican immigration may deny entry if the passport is damaged in any way.

Depending on the length of study, nationality and country of residence, either a tourist or student visa may be required. Costa Rican authorities generally permit most international visitors to stay in the country for up to 90 days without a visa. If required, applications for student visa status can be made after entry on a tourist visa to Costa Rica (student visas are not issued by Consulates of the country.)

SITES OF INTEREST (SPANISH CONTENT)

- Costa Rican Immigration Office - Specific information about visas in Costa Rica <https://bit.ly/2Uwpeek>
- Ministry of External Affairs in Costa Rica.
Home Page: <https://www.rree.go.cr/>
- Representations of other countries in Costa Rica (Embassies and Consulates) <https://bit.ly/2S6BMox>

LOST OR STOLEN PASSPORTS

In an effort to ensure the safety of these travel documents, long-term visitors should always carry a copy of their passports in a wallet and leave the physical document in a secure location. When you arrive in Costa Rica, it is recommended that you contact an attorney and let them photocopy the front page and most recent entry stamp to Costa Rica, from your passport. They will then certify the copy with official stamps and seals and return the documents and the copy to you. The process only takes about 10 minutes and costs about “5,000 colones” (Costa Rica’s currency) or \$10 USD.

If your passport is lost or stolen while you are abroad, you should immediately contact the local embassy or consulate, and the local police. The photocopies of your passport may help facilitate the issuance of a new passport.

STUDENT VISA

International students require a student visa to study in Costa Rica. Please note that you will still enter the country as a tourist and apply to the student visa once you have entered the country.

There is a series of apostilled documents you need to prepare before coming to Costa Rica.

The university offers legal support for those students interested in applying to the visa through the university. This service has a cost of \$500 (it doesn’t include the visa fee).

In order to complete this procedure, you must visit the Global Education Office or contact us at studyincostarica@ulacit.ac.cr and ask for information concerning how to obtain a student visa.

KEEP IN MIND!

Depending on your nationality you have a specific period of time to stay in the country on a regular basis (as a tourist). If you don’t apply for the visa, you must exit the country for a minimum of 72 hours to obtain your tourist condition again and be able to reenter the country.

PACKING FOR COSTA RICA

The most important tip we can offer is to pack light! Remember that you will be responsible for carrying all of your personal belongings and you should therefore be able to easily transport items without help from others. Additionally, you will likely return with more items than you left with and do not want to face extra charges for overweight or additional luggage. We have put together a list of recommended clothing, personal care items, electronics, and other accessories we deem necessary for your stay in San José and travels throughout Costa Rica.

CLOTHING

San José is located at a mean elevation of 1,161 m above sea level and it enjoys a stable yet moderate climate throughout the year. Average daytime temp is 77°F (25°C), rarely exceeding 82°F (27.7°C), and the evening will be even more moderate in the high 60's (15.5°C) to low 70's (21°C). If you are coming during the 'Green Season,' (early May to November), be aware that it rains almost every day from early or late afternoon to the early evening hours. Pack your clothing accordingly and bring an umbrella!

Be sure to pack a comfortable pair of shoes for walking around the city. There are many exciting places to visit and San José has an active shopping scene so walking along the streets can be entertaining, though be advised that not all the sidewalks and streets are in the greatest condition. For evening events, you can dress as formal or informal as you want as the norms change depending on your plans. Many locals and visitors do dress up in the evenings for finer dining and cultural events. Wearing shorts and skirts that are too short for school could be provocative in Costa Rica, so consider where and your purpose for wearing them before you do (they are totally fine when in beaches and doing sports).

Please leave expensive handbags and jewelry at home. They are not necessary, and will only attract negative attention. (Refer to Safety, Security and Theft for more information.) You will find that, even during the warm mornings and afternoons, folks in San José generally wear long pants with a short sleeve shirt. Many places have air conditioning and as mentioned earlier the temperature drops in the evenings, so it is recommended that you carry a sweater or light jacket with you at all times.

Visiting students will also travel outside of the city to experience Costa Rica's natural wonders, from beaches to volcanoes, surfing to sunsets, and waterfalls to animal reserves.

We recommend that you consult the following list and pack these items for your trip to Costa Rica. Remember that most items can be purchased here in San José in case you forget something.

ITEM	PACKED
PASSPORT and travel documents! (The most important thing)	
(1) Pair of comfortable/waterproof walking shoes	
(1) Waterproof jacket	
Set of formal clothes for nights out, nice dinner, business events, etc.	
Light-weight clothing for layering purposes	
Small travel bag (enough room to pack for weekend trips)	
Adapter and voltage converter (most electrical outlets are 2-prong)	
Smart phone, chargers and headphones	
Small gift or token of appreciation from home country for Costa Rican host family	
Bug spray (light option for regular use and rainforest trips)	
Thermos or travel mug	
Digital camera (batteries, charger and protective case) Don't miss the photo-ops!	
Medications (pain reliever, indigestion relief, itch relief for bug bites and any other prescribed medicines that you need)	
Sunscreen (We all know the power of the sun, even behind the clouds!)	
Swimwear	
A secure shoulder bag or travel belt (as opposed to fancy/easily accessible handbags)	



CELL PHONES

Visitors in Costa Rica often wonder if their cell phones will work in the country. Answers to this question vary, depending on the specific type of cell phone technology, the phone itself, and your cellular provider. Of course global phones are an exception, but you should contact your phone carrier and get detailed information on the roaming and data usage charges associated with the use of your cell phone in Costa Rica.

It is recommended that students who are staying for an extended period of time purchase a cell phone once in Costa Rica. You should go to any ICE (national phone company) or any other phone provider, all located downtown San José, to purchase a basic cell phone and a pre-paid SIM card which allows minute to minute calling and texting. We do not recommend that you use your cell phone to call internationally as this will use up minutes quickly. You can, however, receive calls from countries outside of Costa Rica with no penalty to them (please note that home lines initiating an international call will incur varying fees).

We recommend that you keep in touch with your family and friends back home using one of the following online communication tools:

- **SKYPE**- This is an easy and affordable option for long-distance calls. Computer-to-computer calls are free and have video capabilities! Visit <http://www.skype.com> for more information.
- **WhatsApp** - It is a messaging app using phone number and it lets users text, chat, and share media, including voice messages and video with individuals or groups. This is the most common way for Costa Ricans to communicate, so it is essential that you have access to this on your smartphone.

ELECTRONICS

Laptop- It is your decision as to whether or not you bring a personal device on your trip to Costa Rica, but we make the following recommendations pertaining to personal computers:

- Do not carry your personal computer around with you during the day or on public transportation, as you may be a target of theft.
- Will you be using your personal computer for academic or entertainment purposes? If you plan to use it only for entertainment purposes, then leave it home. You do not want to spend your trip in front of a computer screen. Instead you should be enjoying Costa Rica and immersing yourself in the culture; your time in Costa Rica is limited, so make the most out of it!
- Keep in mind that many entertainment websites that can be accessed elsewhere are not available in Costa Rica including Pandora or Hulu.

Adapters- There may be a difference between Costa Rican voltage and foreign electronic devices voltage, and the differences can lead to a shortage in your device. Be sure to purchase an appropriate adapter/converter (2-prong) before you leave.

Voltage in Costa Rica: 110-120 Volts (same as US/Canada).

LINENS

Bed linens are provided for you in the homestay package. Bathroom towels are not included in your homestay. You must bring your own towels or purchase them in Costa Rica. We do, however, recommend that you think about bringing a small beach towel, if you do not wish to purchase one here, and think you might have use for it during your trip.

TOILETRIES

Toiletries and personal products are not provided by your homestay and we recommend that you bring enough toiletries to last them at least the first week. It is not necessary to bring a semester supply along with you, as there are many stores located near the university and host homes. However, that being said, if you need certain brand name products (such as contact solution, etc.) that you are most comfortable with, you may want to bring enough to last your entire trip.

VALUABLES

As it has been mentioned before, we urge you to leave all valuables at home. Jewelry and other luxury items are not necessary and will only draw unnecessary attention to you. If it is something you would feel terrible about losing or destroying- **DO NOT BRING IT!**

HOST FAMILIES

Our homestay program will be one of the most enjoyable and humbling experiences of your study abroad experience! The Global Education Office (GEO) works with a number of host families in San José who, for years, have welcomed international students into their homes. Each home has been carefully selected by GEO to ensure your comfort and safety. Host families speak mostly Spanish, and while some families also have a command of the English language, they are encouraged to help you enhance your foreign language skills at home.

Accommodation with local families not only helps you improve your Spanish language proficiency, but also familiarize with Costa Rican life, traditions and culture.

We take your interest and special needs into consideration. You will be matched with a host family based on your responses to the Housing Request Form which can be found online: http://www.ulacit.ac.cr/international/base_aplication_form.php

Our homestay program includes: private room, two meals per day, a private or shared bathroom, linens, and use of the laundry and kitchen facilities throughout your stay. Your host family will pick you up from the airport on your program start date. If you arrive earlier than your program start date, you should find your own transportation to your homestay. Airport drop-off at the end of your term is not included. Every home is equipped with internet service.

You should communicate your class schedule to your host family. Please let them know if you're missing a meal or arrive later than usual. Costa Ricans generally wake up very early to eat breakfast and will expect you to be present at family meals, unless otherwise specified. If you have specific needs with regards to food or meal

preparation, please notify us on the housing request form and inform your host family.

You should be respectful of all house rules and take care of any household items provided to you throughout your stay. Generally, Costa Rican households do not have dryers and therefore rely on air drying their clothing which takes time, especially in the rainy season when there is more humidity present in the air. You should be aware that clothes put into the wash will not be returned to you for wearing the following day.

Communicate in order to ensure your safety

Your safety is of the utmost importance to ULACIT and each family, so you should make your family aware of your location at all times, in case of an emergency.

You will receive information including: home address, telephone numbers, and a brief host family profile, approximately two weeks before your arrival in Costa Rica to ensure time for student and host-family coordination.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Regardless of the information which may be provided in many travel guides for Costa Rica, US dollars and Euros may NOT be accepted everywhere in Costa Rica and we do not advise students to carry large sums of money with them at any time. It is, therefore, recommended that you consult with your bank and discuss the best options for accessing money during your stay in Costa Rica.

It is imperative that you contact your bank/credit card companies and inform them of your departure and length of stay. Otherwise, companies may block your use of the card, upon seeing foreign charges, assuming fraudulent activity. Credit cards usually provide the best exchange rate but you may also receive a foreign transaction fee with each charge. Consult your credit card company about specific fees before your departure.

Generally, ATMs are used as your primary source of cash throughout your trip to Costa Rica because you receive cash in the local currency (colones) at the bank exchange rate, without a commission charge for the exchange. The ATM will, of course, still have a withdrawal fee associated with it. If you are not sure whether your card will work in a certain ATM, refer to the back of your debit card where you will see a number of symbols (Visa, Plus, Cirrus, Nova, NYCE, etc.), and if the symbols are on the ATM which you are trying to withdraw money from, the transaction should be processed.

Mitch Thompson and Weston Knutson,
University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA.



AT THE AIRPORT

Airport, Airline, and Luggage

Every airline carrier has its own policy on luggage requirements and limitations. You should verify those policies with your airline provider before packing your luggage. Some airlines are more stringent in their weight limits or charge more for luggage that exceeds specified weight limits.

Checked Luggage

The majority of airline carriers will allow each passenger to check only one or two bags at check-in. Generally, checked luggage cannot exceed 50 lbs and the sum of the height, width, and depth cannot exceed 62 inches. If you choose to purchase a lock for your luggage, be sure that it is TSA (Transportation Security Administration) approved. We recommend putting one's personal information (name, address, etc.) inside in case it gets lost.

Carry-On Luggage

Most airlines will allow passengers to have one carry-on bag and one personal item (laptop, purse, etc.) Carry-on bags must be able to fit under the seat in front of you or in one of the overhead bins. Generally carry-on baggage cannot exceed 40lbs in weight and the sum of its height, width and depth cannot exceed 45 inches. Please check with your airline providers as this information varies accordingly. You are urged to pack toiletries and one set of clothes in their carry-on luggage in case your items get lost or stolen during travel. Liquids in carry-on baggage cannot exceed 3.4 ounces and must be stored in a quart-size clear zip lock bag. All valuables, important travel information and documents, and emergency contact information should be kept with you or in your carry-on luggage.

Costa Rica Departure Taxes and Process

In Costa Rica for decades the departure or exit tax (\$30 per person) was paid at a counter in the airport at check-in. However, now, a new system was implemented which includes this tax in tickets price. Most airlines now include this in your ticket, but you will need to confirm when you leave the airport as this process is adopted slowly and sporadically.

In case you have to pay the departure fee, it can be paid to tellers in the "Departure Fee" area, located at the main terminal of the SJO International Airport. They will give you a receipt (hold onto this) and a form which needs to be completed for your airline. Please be advised that you cannot check-in with your airline before the departure fee is cleared. Come to the airport with plenty of time to spare! Please be aware that fees change regularly, so make sure you check the current amount for fees prior to your departure.

Continue to your airline check-in counter to print boarding passes and check luggage. Generally, the aforementioned restrictions will apply to checked baggage when returning to your home country. Be sure to check with your airline carrier and be prepared to pay any associated fees.

Proceed to security, where your documents and boarding passes will be checked, along with screening of carry-on luggage. Due to the accessibility of the international boarding areas, for domestic passengers, once you arrive at your individual boarding area, all carry-on baggage will be manually checked. Be advised that lines may be long and processes generally move slowly at this busy airport terminal. Furthermore, traffic to the airport can be very bad. In an effort to ensure that you have plenty of time to complete your departure process, it is recommended that you arrive at the airport approximately 2-3 hours before your scheduled departure.

ARRIVING TO COSTA RICA

Transportation

Students enrolled in the Host Family Program will be picked up at the airport by their host families. Families will have your picture and your name on a paper.

Those students who are not part of this program will have to either take an UBER or a cab.

Juan Santamaria International Airport (airport code SJO) is located outside one of the busiest highways in the country, so it is possible to take public buses with a frequency of five minutes that can take you straight to:

The city of Alajuela (15 minutes). Rate ₡ 540 or US \$ 1.00

The city of Heredia (40 minutes). Rate ₡ 520 or US \$ 0.95

The capital city of San José (35 minutes). Rate ₡ 540 or US \$ 1.00



FIRST DAYS AT ULACIT

WELCOME WEEK AND ORIENTATION

GEO will welcome you to Costa Rica and ULACIT by providing you with a few orientation sessions and activities.

Before your arrival you will receive our Welcome and Orientation Week Calendar. Some of the sessions include:

Welcome speech from GEO representatives

Campus Tour

Blackboard platform

San José city tour

Introduction to Service Learning

ULACIT learning methodology: (Teaching for Understanding)

Student organizations

Tropical Dance Lesson

Welcome Meal

AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

They prepare cultural and co-curricular activities during the term to take you around and explore San José and the student life at ULACIT.

You will meet them during the welcome week. Please feel free to ask them any questions or help.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hand playing a piano. The hand is wearing a patterned sleeve and a gold watch. The piano keys are visible in the foreground, and the background shows the wooden frame of the piano.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Occupational Health

ULACIT strives to provide the best environmental and safety conditions for students, faculty, and staff on campus. We want to be recognized as the private university in Latin America with the best practices in occupational health, emergency planning and waste management.

ULACIT operates a Commission on Occupational Health and Emergency Brigade in accordance with the Regulations of the Occupational Health Committees in Costa Rica. These groups consist of staff, students, faculty and general practitioners trained in first aid, firefighting and evacuation procedures, for which drills are held regularly.

Emergency

In the event of an emergency, call 911, the emergency hotline in Costa Rica, immediately!

ULACIT is affiliated with the service of Emergencias Médicas, for the attention of any member of the university community. In case of emergency call 2290-5555.

Emergency Info for International Students

If an emergency occurs during office hours, please call the Global Education Office (GEO) at 2523-4041. GEO staff is at your service in case of any emergency and will assist you in receiving the appropriate attention.

Hospitals we recommend in case of an emergency (they accept most health insurance packages)

Hospital Clínica Bíblica:

- Website: <https://www.clinicabiblica.com/en/>
- Phone number: 2522-1000

Hospital CIMA:

- Website: <http://www.hospitalcima.com/>
- Phone number: 2208-1000

Hospital La Católica:

- Website: <http://www.hospitallacatolica.com/>
- Phone number: 2246-3000

Health Insurance

As an international student, you are responsible for your own health insurance and the plan must have international coverage. You are required to show proof of your insurance to the Global Education Office at ULACIT prior to your arrival.

Our medical insurance verification form can be found online at:
http://www.ulacit.ac.cr/international/base_aplicacion_form.php

Immunizations and Disease Prevention

Costa Rica is generally a healthy country, but being at a tropical location usually implies some risks that people face while traveling here, like many other places in the world. As with most diseases, they are avoidable with caution and preventative care.

Immunizations

There are NO immunizations requirements for traveling to Costa Rica, but you should check with your doctors to ensure that your routine vaccinations are up-to-date.

Additionally, you are urged to consult a travel clinic to verify that you are properly prepared for your time abroad. Travel clinics will provide a pre-travel consultation and will make recommendations on immunizations which you may opt to take before traveling to Costa Rica.

There are vaccines against hepatitis A and B, and if you are traveling to Costa Rica, you should get these vaccinations in preparation for your stay. Please call your doctor well in advance as these vaccines are generally administered over a few weeks' time.

PREVENT INSECT BITES

Costa Rica is a tropical country, so there will be pesky bugs flying around, which may carry diseases. You should use insect repellent with 30%-50% DEET and may want to purchase bug repellent containing even more DEET for deep-woods activities. It may also be a good idea to wear long pants and sleeves during peak biting hours (dusk and dawn), specially if travelling outside of the city.

FOOD AND WATER

Follow these tips for safe eating and drinking during your stay in Costa Rica:

- Generally speaking, the water in Costa Rica is safe to drink, unless you are traveling in a remote area! With this being said, everyone's body is different, so you may choose to play it safe and drink only bottled water during your stay.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol.)
- Do not eat food from street vendors.
- Make sure that all your food is fully cooked.
- Do not eat pre-cut fruits/vegetables or fruits/vegetables that have not been thoroughly cleaned and peeled. If you're unsure about this, you'd better not eat it.
- Avoid dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.

SAFETY

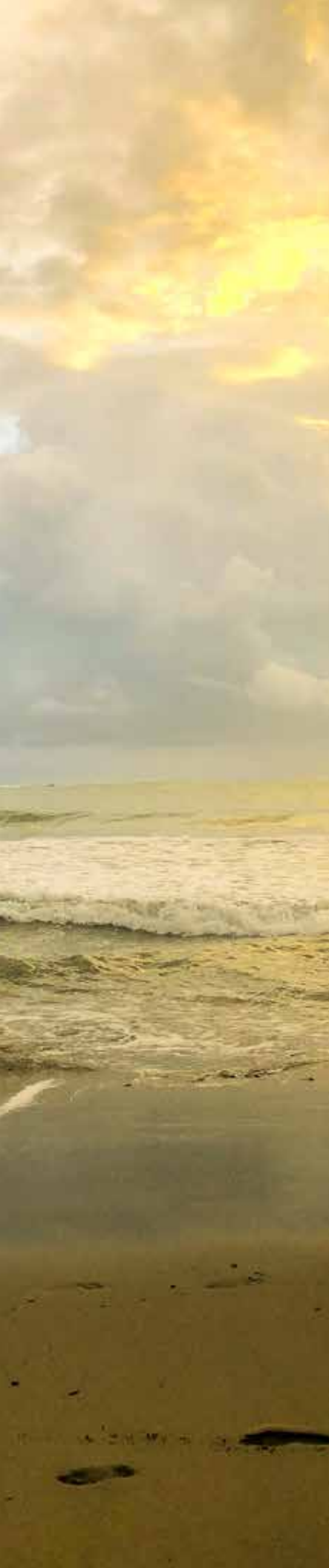
Costa Rica and San José are generally very safe, but like anywhere in the world, you should stay alert and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Crime rates in Costa Rica are much lower than that of other countries, but there is always a chance they will occur.

Never leave personal belongings unattended and do not carry items that may attract attention to you, such as designer bags or expensive jewelry and sunglasses.

We urge you not to visit downtown on your own, if you don't know where you're going, especially early in the morning or in the evening, after dark.

In case of an EMERGENCY call 911, the Costa Rica hotline!





SAFETY AT ULACIT

ULACIT employs a professional team of security officers trained in safety prevention, handling and use of nonlethal force devices, first aid, and firefighting, in order to ensure the safety of our students, faculty, and staff.

Security officers are located throughout campus and also patrol surrounding parking lots, to prevent vandalism, throughout the day and evening hours.

Institutional procedures regarding safety are governed by the Security Procedures Manual, which includes protocols for each job. In the common areas of the institution, ULACIT has electronic security systems, which can prevent or identify risk situations for the student population.

Recommended Safety Precautions for International Students:

- Always walk in groups when going downtown or when travelling outside of the city.
- Do not carry more than \$40.00 in colones when going downtown.
- Use a secure bag or pocket to place your money and personal belongings.
- Do not leave any of your belongings unattended at any moment, anywhere.
- Make a copy of your passport and entry stamp for identification and carry them you at all times.
- Carry only photocopies of your ID's, unless you're going to make a bank transaction.
- Do not wear expensive necklaces, rings, bracelets, purses, belts or any object of high value. We urge you to leave these items at home.
- Always take a taxi or Uber when it is too late, too dark or you are alone.
- Never travel to or visit unfamiliar places without having someone to accompany you.
- Get advice from ULACIT staff, guides or your host families before going anywhere.
- Memorize your homestay address and telephone number, very well, in Spanish and carry it written on paper at ALL times.

EMERGENCY ACTION

ULACIT has an administrative organization that will act in case of an emergency. The Command Center and the brigades have duties and responsibilities with regard to risk prevention and emergencies. In case of major accidents, there is an operative evacuation plan that allows students to make use of exit routes in a controlled manner and with the least possible risk.

For further information about the Security Department, please contact Juan Montero, Director of Security, or call 2523-4064.



WELCOME TO COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is located in Central America, bordered by Nicaragua to the north, Panama to the southeast, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Caribbean Sea to the east. It has a population of around 4.9 million in a land area of 51,100 square kilometers (19,700 square miles). Over 300,000 live in the capital and largest city, San José with a population of an estimated 333,980 in 2019.

Costa Rica has been known for its stable democracy in a region that has had some instability and for its highly educated workforce, most of whom speak English. The country spends roughly 6.9% of its budget (2016) on education, compared to a global average of 4.4%. Its economy, once heavily dependent on agriculture, has diversified to include sectors such as finance, corporate services for foreign companies, pharmaceuticals, and ecotourism. Many foreign companies (manufacturing and services) operate in Costa Rica's Free Trade Zones where they benefit from investment and tax incentives.

Costa Rica has seven provinces, which in turn are divided into cantons. The provinces are: Alajuela, Cartago, Guanacaste, Heredia, Limón, Puntarenas and San José.

THE PEACEFUL SOUL OF CENTRAL AMERICA

If marketing experts could draw up an ideal destination, Costa Rica might be it. The 'rich coast' has earned its name and stands apart from its Central American neighbors on the cutting edge of so many trends: surfing, farm-to-table restaurants, and sustainable tourism. One of the world's most biodiverse countries, with half a million species – from insects to the giant anteaters that devour them – it also protects one-quarter of its wild lands through law. Developing infrastructure is balanced by green energy like wind and hydro, and while there's no standing army, you almost always feel safe.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Rainforest hikes and brisk high-altitude trails, rushing white-water rapids and warm-water, world-class surfing: Costa Rica offers a dizzying suite of outdoor adventures in every shape and size – from the squeal-inducing rush of a canopy zipline to a sun-dazed afternoon at the beach. National parks allow visitors to glimpse life in both rainforest and cloud forest, simmering volcanoes offer otherworldly vistas, and reliable surf breaks are suited to beginners and experts alike. Can't decide? Don't worry: given the country's size, you can plan a relatively short trip that includes it all.

THE WILD LIFE

Such wildlife abounds in Costa Rica as to seem almost cartoonish: keel-billed toucans ogle you from treetops and scarlet macaws raucously announce their flight plans. A keen eye will discern a sloth on a branch or the eyes of a caiman breaking the surface of a mangrove swamp, while alert ears will catch rustling leaves signaling a troop of white-faced capuchins or the haunting call of a howler monkey. Blue morpho butterflies flit amid orchid-festooned trees, while colorful tropical fish, sharks, rays, dolphins and whales thrive offshore – all as if in a conservationist's dream.

THE PURE LIFE

A recent study showed that many Costa Ricans live longer, healthier lives than people on the rest of the planet, and it all comes down to *pura vida* (pure life), a term you'll hear everywhere. Before you dismiss it as marketing banter (and it is a big marketing phrase), listen to how it's used. It means hello, goodbye, everything's cool, same to you. It never has a negative connotation. You may enter the country not believing it, but after a week you'll be saying it, too, unconsciously: *pura vida, mae*. Relax and enjoy the ride.



TOP THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN COSTA RICA

SAN JOSÉ

Costa Rica's capital is located in the center of the country making it a great hub. Overall, the city only requires a few days. There's tons to do in San José. Visit the Museum of Contemporary Art & Design to check out the future of Costa Rican art, the magnificent Teatro Nacional to take in its décor, and the National Museum or Jade Museum located in the town center too.

TORTUGUERO NATIONAL PARK

This park on the Caribbean coast is regarded as one of the most important breeding grounds for the endangered green turtle. It also helps to protect manatees, sloths and various species of monkey. Visit at night to catch the turtles laying their eggs on the beach. It's very out of the way and hard to get to and there isn't much there but if you like jungles, birds, and quiet, this is a must see.

PUERTO VIEJO

Located on the Caribbean coast, this city is popular with backpackers because of its great beaches, surf, and party atmosphere. The town is very lively, and you'll find something going on every night. For those looking for a quieter place, there are many tranquil beach hotels around. It is a favorite destination for many people in the country because its Rasta influence makes it very different than the rest of Costa Rica.

COFFEE PLANTATIONS

Costa Rican coffee is famous all over the world.

By taking one of the coffee plantation tours you can see every step of the refining process and get the chance to buy discounted coffee in the gift shops. Some of the best coffee tours include: Doka Estate and Britt Coffee Tour.

JACÓ BEACH

Jacó was once a sleepy resort town whose main attraction was its excellent surfing, but growing tourism has transformed it into a haven of beach parties and pumping nightclubs. Surf lessons and rentals are widely available on the beaches and sport-fishing is also popular here. For a more sedate affair, head to the nearby Carara Biological Reserve to spot scarlet macaws, armadillos and hundreds of species of bird.

LA PAZ WATERFALL GARDENS

Aside from the famous waterfalls, La Paz also includes an aviary, hummingbird garden, butterfly garden, reptiles, big cats and more. The gardens are the most popular tour from San José have recently been restored.





HACIENDA BARÚ NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

With 800 acres of land, seven kilometers of walking trails, and three kilometers of fantastic beaches, this refuge is another prime example of Costa Rica's natural beauty. Birdwatching, canopy tours, and walking tours are the main attractions in the park.

VOLCANOES

The volcanoes are among the country's top tourist attractions. Since many are located in national parks, you can combine a visit with kayaking, rafting or hiking. Arenal was famous for the lava coming down its side but in 2010 that stopped. There's still beautiful trails nearby though. Irazú is known for its astonishing green-blue lake that sits in one of its craters, while there is a boiling acid lake within a crater of the Poás Volcano (which is close to San José).

CORCOVADO NATIONAL PARK

Corcovado National Park is on the remote Osa Peninsula in southwestern Costa Rica. It's more popular than it used to be but still offers a very rugged, quiet, and off the beaten path destination. Here you'll find pristine jungles, dolphins, and diving away from the much more developed northern western coast. The peninsula is still not easy to get to (which helps keep tourists away), but your efforts will be greatly rewarded.

SANTA TERESA

At the bottom of the Nicoya coast is the hippy backpacker town of Santa Teresa. This "town" really nothing more than a beach with a road lined with eateries, surf shops, and hostels. Not much goes on here as everyone is up early to hit the waves. This is a good place to just go, lay on the beach, hang out with people, and relax. It's an easy place to fall into and spend weeks. Or, like most people, months.

WALK THROUGH THE TREETOPS

The Rainmaker Aerial Walkway was the first aerial walkway to be built in Central America, and it is still considered to be one of the top aerial walkways in the region. At the highest point on the walkway, you'll find yourself a 20 stories above the ground.

LEARN TO SURF

Whether in Puerto Viejo, Cahuita, Manuel Antonio, Jacó, Santa Theresa, or Tamarindo, Costa Rica has a lot of waves and lots of places to learn to surf. In fact, most travelers come here to surf because the waves are world renowned. If you never learned but always wanted to try and Australia, Hawaii, or Bali seem too far, this is your best place to in the region to learn.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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