

Spanish Immersion Costa Rica

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT · LA FORTUNA DE BAGACES, GUANACASTE · WHATSAPP +506 6121 1133

BEFORE YOU COME

What happens next

You have your dates. This is everything between now and your first morning of class — what to do before you fly, how you get here, what the first day looks like, and who to call if something goes wrong. Read it once now and once in the week before you travel.

As soon as your dates are confirmed

YOUR DEPOSIT

\$50 per booked week, by PayPal. Your dates are not held until it arrives. We confirm by email the same day. It is refunded in full if you cancel at least 48 hours before your start date.

YOUR PASSPORT

Check the expiry date now, not later. Most airlines will not board you if it expires within six months of your travel date. Renewing takes weeks in most countries.

ENTRY RULES

Most nationalities enter Costa Rica as tourists without a visa, but the rules depend on your passport and they change. Check with the Costa Rican consulate or embassy for your own country rather than relying on what a friend did. Costa Rica may also ask for proof of onward travel.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Arrange it before you fly, covering medical treatment, repatriation, cancellation and your belongings. Our own insurance covers the company's liability in running the program — it is not cover for you personally. We will ask you to confirm you have it.

YOUR CALL WITH YOUR TEACHER

Before you travel we set up a short call between you and your teacher, so she knows your level and what you want out of the weeks. It is a conversation, not an exam, and there is nothing to prepare.

YOUR TRANSFER

Tell us if you want one, and from which airport. San José needs a \$125 deposit in advance to hold the driver; Liberia does not.

IF YOU ARE UNDER 18

Students **under 16** must travel with an adult. Students aged **16 or 17** may come alone with written permission signed by a parent or guardian — ask us for the form early, as some airlines and immigration officers ask to see it on the way in.

Two weeks before you fly

- **Send us your flight details.** Airline, flight number, arrival date and time. If you booked a transfer we cannot meet you without them.
- **Tell your bank and your card company** that you are travelling to Costa Rica, so your card is not blocked the first time you use it.
- **Tell us about anything we should know.** Food you cannot eat, allergies, anything that affects where you stay or what you can do in an afternoon. Your host family cooks for you three times a day; they need to know in advance, not on the first evening.
- **Check what you are bringing.** See the packing list below.

Getting here

WHICH AIRPORT

Liberia (LIR) is much closer and much cheaper — \$100 each way, and about an hour's drive. **San José (SJO)** is \$300 each way because it is a long drive. If you have a choice when booking flights, fly into Liberia.

WHEN YOU LAND

Clear immigration and collect your bag first. Your driver waits in the arrivals hall with a sign showing your name. If you booked a transfer with us, do not take a taxi — message us on WhatsApp and wait.

IF YOUR FLIGHT IS LATE

Message us on WhatsApp as soon as you know. The driver tracks the flight and waits. A delay does not cost you anything extra.

ARRIVING AT NIGHT

That is fine and it happens often. Your host family will be expecting you whatever the hour. Tell us the time in advance so nobody is waiting up without knowing.

COMING ON YOUR OWN

If you are not booking a transfer, tell us how you are travelling and roughly when you will arrive, and we will tell you where to be met. The address is Barrio El Centro, La Fortuna de Bagaces, north side of the Banco Nacional.

Your first day

YOU ARRIVE

You go straight to your host family's house. Someone from the program introduces you, shows you your room, and walks you round the village so you know where the classroom and the print shop are.

YOUR LEVEL

Already done — you had a short call with your teacher before you travelled, so she knows where to start. There is no test on your first day.

CLASS BEGINS

The next business day. If you arrive on a Saturday, class starts Monday; the weekend is yours and you spend it with the family.

PAYING

The balance is paid here as the weeks go by, most people week by week. Card, cash or wire transfer — whichever suits you. Nothing is due the moment you walk in.

How a normal day runs

AROUND 7:00

Breakfast with the family.

ON THE WALK IN

You stop at the print shop and collect the pages your teacher wrote for you the night before — usually between 10 and 30. This is the \$25 a week you pay there directly.

8:00 TO 12:00

Class, one-to-one or in a small group, with a short break around ten.

MIDDAY

Lunch, usually with the family.

2:30 TO 6:00

An activity, four afternoons a week, with an instructor. On days when the activity has to happen in the morning, class moves to 1:00–5:00 instead.

AROUND 7:00

Dinner with the family. It is the long meal of the day and the best Spanish practice you will get.

WEEKENDS

Yours. Some students travel, some stay with the family. Tell us either way so nobody worries.

What to bring

ESSENTIAL

Passport. Travel insurance documents. A card that works abroad, plus some US dollars or colones in cash for the first days. Any medication you take, in its original packaging, with enough for the whole stay. A refillable water bottle. Sun protection and a hat. Insect repellent. Closed walking shoes you do not mind getting muddy.

WORTH BRINGING

A light rain jacket. Long trousers for horseback riding. Swimwear for the waterfall. A small backpack for afternoons out. A notebook and pens — you will write more by hand here than you expect. An unlocked phone, so you can use a local SIM.

LEAVE AT HOME

Smart clothes — nothing here needs them. A hairdryer or anything heavy that draws a lot of power. Large amounts of cash. Anything valuable you would be upset to lose on a farm or in a river.

Practical things

MONEY

Costa Rica uses the colón, and US dollars are widely accepted. Cards work in towns; the village runs more on cash. Bring some cash for your first days and draw more from a cash machine in Bagaces.

PHONE AND DATA

A local SIM is cheap and far better than roaming. Bring an unlocked phone and we will help you get one in the first days.

WATER

The tap water here is drinkable. Bring a refillable bottle and fill it at the house rather than buying plastic.

INTERNET

There is wifi, and it is rural wifi. It is good enough for messages, calls home and looking things up. Do not plan to stream films or run video meetings all evening.

ELECTRICITY

110 volts, the same flat two-pin plugs as the United States. Bring an adaptor if you are coming from Europe.

LAUNDRY

You have access to the family's laundry room and you do your own washing. The family does not provide laundry as a service — though being Costa Rica, there is every chance somebody does it for you anyway.

WHAT TO WEAR

Nothing formal, ever. Clothes you can walk, ride and work in. It is hot by day; evenings in the dry season can be cooler than people expect.

WEATHER

Guanacaste has a dry season roughly December to April and a green season roughly May to November. The green season is not a washout — it usually rains in the afternoon, and everything is greener. Water is scarcer in the dry season, so keep showers short.

Safety, health and emergencies

In the years this program has run we have not had a serious accident. That is not a reason to skip this page — it is the reason to read it once now, so you are not reading it for the first time when something happens.

In an emergency

EMERGENCY NUMBER

911 — Costa Rica's general emergency line, for ambulance, police and fire. Answered in Spanish, and usually in English.

ALSO CALL US

WhatsApp +506 6121 1133. Call 911 first if it is urgent, then us. We will come, and we will translate.

Where you would be treated

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

Hospital San Rafael Arcángel, Liberia — private, well equipped, and used to treating visitors. Telephone 2690 5500. About an hour from the village. This is where we take students unless there is a reason not to. You pay or claim on your insurance; bring your policy details.

THE NEARER OPTION

The CCSS EBAIS in Bagaces — the public clinic, about 30 minutes away. Closer, and right for something minor.

TAKE WITH YOU

Your **passport** above all — no clinic in Costa Rica will treat you properly without it — and a **credit or debit card**. Keep your insurance policy number somewhere you can reach it on your phone.

Who to contact, and when

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Patricia Duarte, our program coordinator, will message you before you fly, so you already have a person and a name before you land. She is the one who looks after students while they are here — your host family, your meals, your afternoons. Anything you want to ask in advance, ask her.

ONCE YOU ARE HERE

You and your **host family** exchange numbers on your first day, and you will see Patricia regularly. For most things — you are ill, you are running late, you are lost in the village — they are the fastest people to reach, and they are two minutes away.

ANYTHING BIGGER

Call the program on **WhatsApp +506 6121 1133**. Day or night. You are not bothering anyone.

Worth knowing before your first walk

We are beside a volcano and next to protected areas, and we work to keep the wildlife here. That is the good part. It also means a few sensible habits.

SNAKES

There are venomous snakes in Guanacaste. Wear closed shoes on trails and around farms, watch where you put your feet and your hands, and do not step over a log without looking at the far side. If you see one, stop and back away — do not try to move it or photograph it up close. Tell your instructor; they know what to do.

OTHER ANIMALS

Expect to meet wildlife, because that is rather the point of being here. Watch it, photograph it from a distance, do not feed it and do not touch it. The same goes for farm animals — ask before you approach, especially where there are young.

DOGS

Village dogs are everywhere and almost all of them are friendly. One student has been bitten in the whole history of the program, so it is uncommon — but do not pet a dog you do not know, do not approach one that is eating or sleeping, and if a dog bites you, however minor it looks, tell us the same day. A bite is one of the few things here that must be seen by a doctor.

RIVERS

In the green season — roughly May to November, what Costa Ricans call winter — rivers rise fast and the current gets strong, sometimes while the sky above you is clear. Do not swim or cross a river in that season unless you are with an instructor who says it is fine that day.

SUN AND HEAT

Guanacaste sun is stronger than it feels, especially on a horse or in water. Hat, sunscreen, and drink more water than you think you need. Afternoon activities are long and outdoors.

When you leave

YOUR TRANSFER BACK

Tell us your departure flight at least a week ahead. We work backwards from check-in and tell you what time the driver comes.

SETTLING UP

Anything outstanding is paid before you go. There are no exit fees and nothing is added at the end.

THE FEEDBACK FORM

We ask every student to fill one in. It is short, it is read, and it is where most changes to this program have come from. Please be blunt.

STAYING IN TOUCH

Many students come back — not to the program, to the family. Nobody minds a message in bad Spanish at Christmas.

Anything not answered here?

Write or message any time before you travel. No question is too small, and it is better asked now than worked out at an airport.

[Ask us](#)