



From A to Z

2010

An Orientation Packet
To Help You Enjoy Your Stay
In Costa Rica
At ILISA Language Institute

In Costa Rica:

phone: (506) 2280-0700 – fax: (506) 2225-4665 emergency cell phone (506) 88252089

mailing address: ILISA, Apartado 1001, 2050 San Pedro, Costa Rica

School location: de la Iglesia de San Pedro, 400 sur, 125 este; edificio ILISA

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Activities

ILISA offers a cultural program with four afternoon activities every week. The most popular is the weekly happy hour that occurs every Monday near the school building. Also featured are weekly dance classes on Mondays at the school with an outside instructor. We offer cooking classes where you may learn how to prepare delicious Costa Rican traditional food besides learning some new Spanish words. In addition to these steady activities there are many others that cycle throughout the weeks, including culture classes and guided trips to local attractions.

Also, it is very common for students to plan events independently such as going to the Teatro Nacional to see a show, taking classes at a dance school, afternoon coffee breaks, or an evening movie.

Addresses

Finding your way around in downtown San José may seem a bit confusing at first. The "New Key to Costa Rica" includes a useful chapter on getting to know San José. Here are some important facts:

- Addresses are given by Avenida (avenue) and Calle (street).
- Avenues run east-west, and streets run north-south.
- Avenida Central and Calle Central are the starting points for all other roads.
- Even-numbered avenues are to the south of Avenida Central with odd-numbered ones to the north.
- Correspondingly, even-numbered streets are to the west of Calle Central with odd-numbered ones to the east.

Example: An address that's given as Avenida 1, Calles 3 and 5 means that the place is located on Avenida 1 between Calles 3 and 5.

Addresses are nice, however don't expect "ticos" (that includes most taxi drivers) to use avenue-street descriptions when going somewhere, especially outside the city center. They tend to use landmarks instead. They'll say that such-and-such-a-place is "two blocks west of the central post office and half a block north, next to so-and-so's coffee shop" (100 metros = 1 block). Even more confusing for tourists is when "ticos" use a point of reference that no longer exists. Don't worry, you'll soon get the hang of it. Regarding the address of our Institute, the reference point is the church in San Pedro. Our complete address is "de la iglesia de San Pedro, 400 al sur, 125 al este a mano derecha" (from the church of San Pedro, 400 meters south, and 125 meters east on the right hand side). The entrances to nearly all churches face west.

Airport pick-up charge

If you require airport pickup & transfer it is included. The airport return is between \$22 and \$25 as petrol

prices may increase. In case your plane is late and the driver needs to pay extra parking, please note that you will be responsible with the payment for the extra parking.

Allergies

The majority of allergy problems in Costa Rica are caused by dust rather than pollen. If you suffer from allergies, relief is easily found – most allergy medicines are available over the counter in every pharmacy.

American Express

American Express (tel. 2295-9000) has a counter in San José at the Banco de San José on Calle Central between Avenidas 3 and 5. It's open Monday through Friday from 8am to 7pm. If your travelers' checks are lost or stolen, call 0-8000-120039. VISA: 2295-9898

Apartments

While we encourage students to participate in the homestay program, some students who are planning an extended stay or wish to live alone choose to stay in a local hotel, apartment or aparthotel. Options include Hotel Le Bergerac, Boutique Hotel Jade, Hotel Milvia, Casa Conde and Tairona Apartments. Check with the Enrollment Coordinator about options and special ILISA prices.

ILISA also has a new bed and breakfast right in front of the school. Please check with the enrollment coordinator about prices and availability.

Arrival

When traveling by plane, you'll arrive at Juan Santa María International Airport. Your first stop after leaving the plane will be at Immigration. The airline should give you two forms, one for Immigration, and one for Customs. If you are only bringing into the country your personal belongings, just write down "personal belongings" on the customs form. The immigration form asks for your intended address in Costa Rica. Simply write down: "familia de ILISA Instituto de Idiomas." Have both forms ready along with your passport before getting to immigration.

After passing immigration, take the escalators down to the luggage claim area. There is a counter for lost baggage, if by chance your bags are delayed or lost.

Your next stop is customs. If you have two bags or less you can usually just walk on through. After passing through customs go with the flow and you'll reach the exit. If you were using an airport luggage cart, you'll be required to leave it in the airport. They don't allow you to take it outside. An ILISA driver will be waiting for you outside. Just look for somebody with a white ILISA sign with blue lettering and your name on it. We will take care of the rest. (note: see "Z last word" at the end of

orientation). Please note that the airport wait is up to 1 hour. In case a bag is lost and you need to report it and finish the procedure later, the payment of the extra waiting time (extra parking time) is your responsibility (parking charge is 5 USD/hour).

Art

Costa Ricans are well known for their interest in culture and the arts. The Ministry of Culture sponsors theater, choral music, opera, dance, literature, poetry, art, sculpture and film.

Music

The Teatro Nacional is a fantastic setting in which to see great performances of music (along with many other arts). For instance the symphony features famous guest directors and soloists along with the reputable National Symphony. The prices are also reasonable, from inexpensive to moderately expensive for the best seats in the house. Costa Rica is also blessed with a number of gifted folk singers that regularly perform. Check the weekly newspaper "Tico Times" (English) and the daily "La Nación" (Spanish).

Theater

Ticos are great actors. In San José alone there are more than 17 theater groups performing on a regular basis. Even if you can't understand the language, it is worth the time to go to see the energy and the creativity that the players bring to the stage. You can check the *Tico Times* or the "Viva" section of *La Nación* for information on local theatres. Admission is usually between \$4.00 to \$8.00 USD. Generally, performances are held Thursday through Sunday. When there are suitable works playing, ILISA sometimes takes students as part of the cultural activities program.

Films

North American movies dominate the screens in Costa Rica. The movies come out about 3 months after the release dates in the States. If you are interested in foreign films, fantastic exceptions to this rule are the **Sala Garbo** and the **Teatro Laurence Olivier** located next to each other near Paseo Colón. Sala Garbo offers excellent international films with Spanish subtitles and the Teatro Laurence Olivier offers films, plays, and concerts as well as one of the better coffeehouses in San José. Recently local jazz groups have been playing in its Shakespeare Bar.

Art Museums

The Ticos converted their former airport terminal into the **Museum of Costa Rican Art**. This museum displays the work of the country's finest painters and

sculptors, as well as international exhibits and is located in La Sabana at the end of Paseo Colón. Other interesting museums are the **Museo de Oro** and **Museo Jade** which exhibit delicate gold and jade workings from the indigenous periods of Costa Rican history, the **Museo Nacional** and the **Museo de Arte Moderna**.

Museo de Arte Costarricense, Tuesday through Friday, 10 to 5 p.m., \$5.00

Museo de Oro, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 9:30 to 4:00 p.m., \$6

Museo Jade, Monday through Friday, 8:30 to 4:00 p.m., \$2:00

Museo Nacional, Tuesday through Sunday, 8:30 to 4:30 p.m., \$3.00

The National Theatre, from Monday to Saturday 9:00 to 4:00 pm, \$3.

NOTE! All prices include the student discount for ILISA students

Associations and Clubs

Lion's Club, call 250-6975.

Rotary Clubs, call 222-0993.

ATM Machines

There are ATM's in all large cities and in cities with high tourism. Be sure to check with your home bank before leaving for Costa Rica about the charge rate for using an ATM in another country. Also be aware when traveling to smaller cities that ATM's may not be abundant or may not accept your card. Because of this, it is recommended to always have enough cash before leaving the city when traveling to smaller towns. Especially in beach towns. Credit card use can also prove difficult in many of the smaller cities. ATM's with the following logos are all within walking distance of ILISA: BCR Visa, BCR Debito, Visa, Visa Electron, Plus, Cirrus, Maestro, and Mastercard. Some cards won't work at certain banks, so if your card doesn't work at one ATM, try another down the road. You'll find one that works quickly.

Attitude

Be prepared for a bit of a culture shock when you come to San Pedro. Costa Rican people have very different ideas about many things. But the best thing to do is to realize that you are the visitor, and that the burden of cultural adjustment is upon you. Even though the Costa Rican style of life is not completely different from your own, there will be significant changes to which you will have to adjust. Besides, if everything were exactly the same as what you are used to, where would the fun be?

For instance, the issue of communication can be a very real problem. Literal translations of English idiomatic expressions can be dangerous. A woman once said to a shop owner when he quoted a price, "I can't believe it." What she meant to say was that she

was surprised at how cheap the item was, but the owner felt that she was calling him a liar, became very upset and nearly threw her out of the store. Don't assume that you will be able to transmit a message easily and always try to express yourself as clearly as possible with the words that are the most correct for the situation. We all know about the problems of communication even between members of a family; be aware that in a foreign country the problem is that much greater.

With this example in mind here are some other differences you should be prepared for. Quiet and peaceful households are a rarity. Whether it is dogs barking, roosters crowing, street noise, neighbors or relatives visiting or a señora banging around the kitchen making a meal, much of Costa Rica is noisier than what you might be used to.

Another thing is that families in general stay together much longer than you may be used to. It is common for three generations of families to be living together under the same roof. It is a way to increase the household income and to help one another. In addition, most young people don't leave home until they marry and doing so is often interpreted as a lack of love for their parents.

Lastly, in Costa Rica time takes time, lots of time. Punctuality may be a concept of the future. "Hora Tica" is different. (This is not the case for your ILISA classes and if you will be visiting business colleagues or potential clients, arrive on time!)

These are just a few examples of what you are likely to encounter when you come here. Remember that Costa Rica is a less developed country than the one that you might be used to. It is not a good idea to focus on the negative aspects of the life here. If you come wanting to tell the people about the necessity for more trash cans on the street, or lecture them about the ineffectiveness of the bureaucracy here, you are likely to miss many of the positive aspects that the country has to offer. Once again, Costa Rica is a place of difference. Try to look at the difference as something to learn from, or something to enjoy. If you have this attitude, we can assure you that Costa Rica and its people will not let you down.

Bars

There are numerous bars and dance clubs in the area. First of all there is Rockolas where we will have our Mondays Happy Hours. Some popular places with the students of the University of Costa Rica include: Caccio's, Copas, Rock Grill and Terra U. These are all located next to the University. Also in the vicinity are Raices (featuring Reggae music) and Sand (featuring hard rock), which are both near the Mall of San Pedro. Other popular nightlife sights include Escazú. Popular bars in this area include Sambuca, and Van Gogh. For Latin dancing head out to Castros in Barrio Mexico. Certain bars are more popular on different nights of the week.

Beaches

Do you prefer white, black, yellow or red sand? Do you like to surf, ride horses, fish, or walk for miles without seeing another person on beaches edged with jungle and specked with wind-shaped driftwood? Would you like to walk into jungle paths where you can see sloth, toucans, parrots, and monkeys? Or would you like to watch as thousands of sea turtles come ashore to lay eggs in the sand? Costa Rica has all of this in its fantastic collection of beachscapes and more.

Accommodations range from luxury hotels and reasonably priced motels to basic rooms in seaside cabins, hostels and the rustic, cheap and delightful option of camping out on the beach. We have many people in the office who are seasoned beach travelers and would be happy to share their information with you. We encourage all of you to take the time to explore as much of Costa Rica as possible in your stay here. It is a country blessed with an incredible opulence of natural wealth. Our travel desk operator Jean-Pierre will help you make your arrangements.

Blues

Jazz Café: *Contiguo al antiguo Banco Popular San Pedro* *(about 350 metros east of the church on Avenida Central). This upscale bar/restaurant has live music every night. Salads range from 2000-4000 colones and pasta from 2900-4600 colones. Late night cocktails and music attract a large crowd. Cover charge ranges from 2000-4000 colones depending on the music group. Open daily from 6 PM. Phone: 2253-8933. Reservations are recommended to secure a table.

Soda Blues: a Calle 11, y Villa Borghese, a Avenida 9.

Books on Costa Rica

There are a variety of good guidebooks on Costa Rica. Ask for our eBook on Guidebooks in Costa Rica or check at Amazon.com. We have found the best to be the Lonely Planet and Globetrotter's Guide to Costa Rica.

Bus Schedules

Schedules for the long distance buses are available at the reception desk. It is possible to travel just about anywhere by bus and cheaply (anywhere from \$5 to \$30 round trip).

Private minibuses (Interbus) are also available to almost all tourist destinations. Please ask for reservations and schedules at the reception upon arrival.

Intercity buses leave every 5-10 minutes. Buses run until around 10:30 PM but taxis are recommended for

the night hours. Students will be told the appropriate bus stops for travel among their home or apartment, ILISA, and San Jose upon their arrival.

Business Hours

Banks are usually open Monday through Friday from 9am to 3pm. Private banks are open longer (till 5pm to 6 PM). **Offices** are open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. They may close for an hour for lunch. **Stores** are open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm. **Bars** are open until 1 or 2am. Some **restaurants** stay open 24 hours, while others close between meals.

Car Rental

See the 'Driving' section under Transportation.

CEU's/CPE's, CME's

If your profession requires you to earn Continuing Education Units (CEU's; depending on your profession also referred to as CME, CNE, CLE, CPE), you may want to check with your state board to see if you can get them for your language training at ILISA. Our private programs can be tailored to your professional needs (request our needs assessment form if you didn't receive one in the course of signing up), particularly in the areas of healthcare, education, accounting and legal services.

Cell Phone Rental

Cell phones can be rented from ILISA at very competitive rates; please speak to the enrollment coordinator if you are interested. Unless you find a willing local to buy you a special card, your cell phone from home won't work here. The only exception is T-Mobile, but you need to talk with your phone company to change the phone encoding before you arrive.

Certificates/diplomas

At the end of your program, ILISA will give you a certificate stating starting and ending dates, number of hours and whether or not you stayed with a host family. If you need a special certificate or statement, please contact the enrollment coordinator no later than the Monday of your last week.

Change of Groups

see First Day

Children

Ticos love children. Both men and women seem to be naturally sensitive to the needs of children, to help you lift them on or off the bus, or to include the kids in conversation. If you have babies

(especially fair-haired ones), be prepared to be stopped on the street while people admire them.

ILISA offers classes for children ages 5 and up. The scheduling is flexible and is normally less intensive than our adult programs. Nanny Service is also available. Upon request, we will make every effort to place you and your children in a family with children of the same or similar ages. It is something incredible to watch how children work together to overcome language barriers efficiently while adults are much more reserved.

Costa Rica also offers many children-friendly vacation spots of which we would be happy to advise you, including, for instance, beaches in which children are safe to splash around.

Class Schedules

Whatever level Spanish you have, you can start classes on any Monday throughout the year, except of course if we are closed for a national holiday.

Classes normally are from 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. with a coffee break between 10 - 10:20 a.m. For those of you who take the 6-hours/day program, classes continue from 1:15 - 3:15 p.m., with a break between 2:10 - 2:20. This schedule allows you sufficient time for lunch. The executive program extends to 4:00 p.m. If there is nobody in your Spanish level group and wish to receive group classes, we offer 3 hours of private classes instead of 4 hours of group classes.

During the busy months (June, July and August) your group may have to be assigned afternoon classes from 1 to 5 p.m. (note: this type of scheduling is rare, so you can plan on taking classes in the morning). During the same months we occasionally schedule afternoon tutoring sessions from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

New students will have a placement interview on their first Monday. After checking in at the reception desk, you can wait for the program to call you for an interview, and you will also receive a first-day orientation. The orientation prepares you for daily life in San José and ILISA. On subsequent Mondays you will find the new morning and afternoon schedules posted on the bulletin board located in the entryway. This information includes where your class is located, and who your teacher is for the week.

Climate

Costa Rica is a tropical country, which means lots of sun. What many people don't know is that there is also quite a bit of rain. The rainy season starts in early May and lasts until November. During the rainy season 85% of all showers occur during the afternoon or evening. The mornings are generally sunny and clear. If you attend school during this season, don't forget your umbrella! Heavy rains are not continuous, but it only takes seconds for the rain to soak you.

December through May is the dry season. During this period, temperatures are slightly lower than those in the rainy season, i.e. approximately 17 C/60 F in the evening, and 25 C/78 F during the day. We recommend that you bring one or two warm sweaters for chilly evenings or for trips to the mountains. For the hot and humid tropical days at the beach, light cotton clothing is the most comfortable and practical choice. Bring plenty of this type of clothing because a regular change is absolutely necessary!

Computer Lab

ILISA has about 4 computers available for students to use during regular school hours. You can use the lab for Internet access and email. Word processing can also be available upon request. All these services are free, but please realize that Internet service in Costa Rica may be a bit slower than you are used to at home.

Credit Cards

Credit cards can usually be used in many of the larger cities and areas with a high level of tourism. Visa and MasterCard are the most common. However, some places may charge a commission to use the card so be sure to ask in advance. Also, always be sure to write down the phone number to call in case of card loss/theft. Keep this number separate from your card.

Credits

See University Credits.

Crime

Costa Rica is a relatively safe country but as in all places in the world, crime does exist. The most common is petty-theft such as pickpockets. Pickpockets tend to target tourist that appear to be easy targets. To protect yourself against pickpockets try to use a money belt. Never keep your wallet in your hind pants pockets – it is much safer in the front pockets. The more discreet the better, so if you can leave your wallet at home, a few loose bills might look less conspicuous. Try not to carry more money than necessary and scatter the money in different places. Always be aware, just use common sense and try not to get distracted.

Crossing a street

Be careful when crossing streets and always use a cross-walk. Cars do tend not to stop for pedestrians as in many other places and even crosswalks require you to be alert! It is the responsibility of the person crossing to remain safe and out of the way of the cars.

Cultural Program

Our cultural program consists of a series of lectures and afternoon activities each week. These activities are an excellent addition to your language learning experience at ILISA. This optional program is available to all students and free, except for an occasional (public) transportation fee or entry charge. All details and dates are posted on Friday afternoons. Activities begin in the afternoon no earlier than 3:15 p.m., which allows most students the opportunity to participate. Since our cultural programs are optional, in some cases we may ask you to sign up ahead of time so that we can estimate how many participants will be attending. Activities range from Latin dance lessons to lectures on Costa Rican culture. Our programs are a lot of fun, so be sure to join us. See Activities.

Currency

The official currency is the Colon. In December 2007, 1 USD was equal to 502 colones. ILISA offers an exchange service two times a week; so you do not have to go to the bank and wait in the long line. See Money Exchange.

Dating

Though dating can be the most interesting and rewarding type of interpersonal relationship between people of different cultures and societies, it can also be the most difficult. Between people involved in a romantic relationship there is not only a verbal communication, but another more subtle communication that is non-verbal. The results of this fact are many more opportunities for interesting interactions but also for wrong interpretations. Be aware that when you enter into a relationship with a person from a different culture, you are entering into a situation that is more volatile than what you are used to in your home country. It can be at times strenuous, but at the same time valuable.

Some of the basic differences in the rules of "amor": women almost never ask men to go out; the man is expected to take the initiative to propose a date. Another rule is that men are expected to pay for dates, except when going out with groups where everyone pays their own bill. Another, for a first date, never ask a woman or a man for dinner at your apartment without other people. The significance of a date is very much different in Costa Rica than it is, for example, in the United States or Europe. First dates in the U.S. or Europe usually are an opportunity to get to know someone else better or to show a desire to share free time together. But in Costa Rica, a "date" between two people almost always represents a romantic interest; it is more usual for people to go out together in groups in order to get to know each other.

The best advice for someone coming to Costa Rica is to try to show, as clearly as possible, towards a man or woman your desire for friendship before anything else. Ticas and Ticos are very willing

to talk with strangers and this is a great advantage in your possibilities of getting to know someone. If you treat the person you are interested in as a friend first, who knows where your relationship could lead?

Dentist

See Medical Services.

Departure

Even though you are just arriving, we wanted to let you know of a few details about your departure. Costa Rica charges an exit tax per person of \$26 payable at the airport in dollars or colones only. If you want to pay ahead of time to avoid the lines you can pay your departure tax in any Banco de Costa Rica, make sure to bring your passport. In addition, you will have to pay transportation to the airport. (We can arrange for one of ILISA's drivers to take you for about \$25 or you can take a taxi for about the same.)

In case your luggage is lost or delayed, you may wish to write ILISA's address and phone number on your luggage tags in case they're delayed or lost. Use our physical address: De la Iglesia de San Pedro, 100 mts este, 400 mts sur, 25 al este. Our phone: 280-0700. Generally, lost luggage is not a problem, but if your bags are heavier than the normal weight allowance, they may be delayed for a few days.

Dress

Costa Rica is not a rich country. But in spite of this they have developed the curious art of having little money and not showing it. People seen on the streets of the towns and cities are well-dressed, as if it were just another proof of the "well-known fact" that Costa Rica is the best country in Central America. You will not go wrong to dress neatly, but dress is likely quite similar to what could be seen around the streets of a city in California. Bring comfortable clothes and shoes for school and travel and something nice for a night on the town or a business meeting.

Drinking

The legal drinking age in Costa Rica is 18 years of age. The average price of beer is between 700-1500 colones. Some popular local beers are Pilsen and Imperial. The local liquor is called *guaro* and is made from sugar cane. No matter what your beverage of choice, always remember to drink responsibly – you are in a different environment. And remember, alcohol kills the brain cells you need to learn Spanish!

Drugs

Don't do drugs! Just say no! This sounds cliché but if you get caught, you won't enjoy Costa Rica's state hotel. ILISA also has a zero tolerance policy regarding drug use. One strike and you're out (of

ILISA). Luckily, we've never had to enforce this rule.

E-mail

E-mail and Internet access is free. Access to your Hotmail, Yahoo mail or similar accounts is easy. If you plan to bring your own laptop to access e-mail systems at home or at your company, make sure your laptop has an LAN card and bring a RJ-45 cable (3 ft. should be enough). Also, make sure you have all the login/tech info to access your home/company network. We don't have a full-time techie on staff so do your homework on this. Please note that correspondence with ILISA's staff should go to spanish@ilisa.com or enrollment@ilisa.com.

Electricity

The electrical current used in Costa Rica is 110 volts, AC. The sockets are American-style, but usually don't have a place for a grounding prong. American and Canadian appliances whose plugs don't have grounding prongs should work, but it's always a good idea to check with your family or hotel about the voltage *before* you plug anything in.

Embassies & Consulates

Addresses and phone numbers of all embassies and consulates are available in ILISA's office.

Emergency Numbers

In case of an emergency during working hours, contact the ILISA staff at 506-2280-0700, extension 106. On the weekends, try our on-call cell phone at 506-8825-2089. If that doesn't work, try ILISA's Director Ana Lorena Alfaro 2442-2151.(home)

Entry and Exit

Upon arrival, most tourists are given permission to remain in Costa Rica for 90 days. To officially extend that time limit, you must request permission prior to the end of the 90 day period by going to the Immigration office, in La Uruca (on the road to the airport).

If you plan on being in Costa Rica for more than 90 days, we strongly recommend that you take a quick 3 day trip into Panama or Nicaragua (for the more adventuresome) by car or bus. For those of you that would like to go to nearby islands (1 hour flight), we recommend the San Andres Islands (Columbian). Unlike mainland Columbia, these islands are very safe and fun. They are a frequent tourist stop for Costa Ricans who want to get away for a weekend.

If you don't leave the country, and you overstay the 90 day limit, you will be required to pay a \$ 30 US fine on top of your airport tax. **The airport tax is \$26 US.** There will be no further consequences when you overstay your 90-day limit but theoretically,

you do run the risk of being deported if you run into the immigration authorities after 90 days. Your driver's license is also invalid after 90 days. Please speak with our enrollment coordinator if the above will apply to you at some point.

Excursions

ILISA has its own in-house tourist front desk. Andrea will help you with all of your travel needs. Popular trips include: any number of the scores of Costa Rican beaches, Arenal Volcano and hot springs, Monteverde Cloud Forest, White Water Rafting, Tortuguero National Park among many others.

Fax Service

If you wish to send faxes at ILISA, please ask the office staff for one of our cover sheets. The current fax rates can be found in the reception area.

Fellow Students

ILISA is synonymous with friends. There is a great rapport among students, which becomes a great source of information about traveling and life in San Pedro. ILISA is truly an international environment with students coming from all over the world.

First Day

The first Monday you begin class is a little different from other Mondays. We always have a lot of new faces, and the first part of the morning is devoted to placing students in classes that correspond to their level of Spanish proficiency.

When you first arrive, we will give you a form asking for personal information if we are lacking any. Please give it back to any staff member. This is also a great moment to pay your course costs (if you have a remaining balance).

In the meantime, Ana Lorena, our program director, will interview all new students to assess their Spanish proficiency level. After all students have been tested, groups will be formed, teachers assigned, and classes will start.

The staff here at ILISA usually does a good job at correctly placing students in the appropriate groups. If during the first few days, however, you or your teacher feels that you are in the wrong group, talk with Ana Lorena so we can make any necessary adjustments.

Also, you will not need to go through the interview process every week. On subsequent Mondays, please check the class distribution plan located in the reception area and then get right to work with your new teacher.

Every Monday there is a brief orientation session for new students after the interviews are completed and while the teachers are forming groups and getting materials ready for class. This orientation session is offered to help you get acquainted with daily life in Costa Rica and answer any remaining

questions you still have after reading this. If a large group of students start class on the Monday you arrive, you will start your Spanish class after the 10 AM coffee break. If only a few new students start school, you will start class at approximately 9 AM.

Fitness

For those of you interested in fitness training check with the following:

Gimnasio Mall San Pedro: located in the Mall of San Pedro. The gym has facilities for weight training, aerobics, physical conditioning, and internet access. Students from ILISA receive a discount membership rate when using their ID.

Gimnasio Cipreses: 2271-0357 (located in Curridabat) A huge multi-gym. It has a variety of different types of fitness activities including aerobic activities, tennis courts and nice swimming pools. Students from ILISA are able to get a discounted monthly rate. Check with the office staff for more details.

Victoria Gym: located in San Pedro- costado este del antiguo Banco Antiguo, alto laboratorios Fuji- 2224-3963. The gym has facilities for weight training, aerobics, and physical conditioning. Students from ILISA receive a discount membership rate when using their ID.

Gallo Pinto

Those who stay in Costa Rica for a while develop a noble affection for the bean. And nowhere does this affection have as much opportunity to grow than with the national breakfast dish known as Gallo Pinto. It is made with a mixture of black beans, rice, and well-seasoned with onions, sweet pepper and fresh coriander. Soon you will be hooked on this tico breakfast!

Gays and Lesbians

By Central American standards, Costa Rica is an open and inviting place for gay and lesbian travelers, who will find a wide range of networking resources. There is a thriving gay nightlife in San José, but compared to it, fewer amenities exist in other parts of the country specifically tailored to gays. Gay and lesbian couples will find Costa Rica's many resort communities hospitable, especially Manuel Antonio, and should not have any trouble locating comfortable accommodations.

Several local publications to consult concerning the gay/lesbian scene include **Gente 10**, which includes some articles in English, and **YKE Noticias Boletín** which reports on gay and lesbian politics in Costa Rica and Latin America. You can also consult any guide book or the *Exploring Costa Rica Guide* published by the Tico Times for more information on gay and lesbian friendly hotels and resort locations.

You can find out more about the gay and lesbian community in Costa Rica at www.gaycostarica.com.

Haircut

There are barbershops and hair cutting salons all over San Pedro. Prices vary but good salons can be found that charge only around \$10-\$25US. Haircuts for men will only cost a couple bucks. We recommend the places around the San Pedro church. For directions you may ask Andrea at the reception.

Health Care

See Medical Services.

Holidays

January 1, New Year's Day
 Easter, Wednesday noon through Easter Sunday
 April 11, Battle of Rivas
 May 1, Labor Day
 July 25, Guanacaste Day, celebrating its annexation.
 August 2, Virgin of Los Angeles
 August 15, Mother's Day
 September 15, Independence Day
 October 12, Day of the Races
 December 25, Christmas Day.

While these are the official holidays, during Christmas holiday week between Christmas and New Year's, and during Easter week (Holy week) from Wednesday noon through Sunday, most of the country is shut down. Not only are the banks and offices closed, but buses don't run on some days, meaning that you need to plan ahead where you will be, with reservations, and how you will get around.

During 2010, ILISA will be closed on the Thursday and Friday preceding Easter and September 17th. There are no classes on these days and only private classes will be made up. We tried to transfer most of the holidays to the following Friday so that you may have a long weekend☺.

Homework

Teachers will assign homework during the week. These assignments range in content from grammar exercises to reading literature selections to preparing a presentation on a topic of your choice. Independent studying is also recommended in order to get the most out of your classes and time in Costa Rica. If you dedicate an average of 2 hours a day to homework and studying, you will likely see great results.

Host Families

Our homestay program is a very important part of your overall language experience. We have selected our families with careful consideration with respect to their friendliness and helpful attitudes

towards students. We have also selected homes that offer a level of comfort not too far from what you are used to finding in your home country. Our selection process assures that all our students will have a comfortable and pleasant stay in Costa Rica.

Although our families receive compensation to provide you a home, they do enjoy having a foreign student as their guest. With a little flexibility on both sides, you will develop a friendly and beneficial relationship with your host family. The more open you are to a new culture, the more you will thrive.

Meals

Your family will provide you with breakfast and dinner. Fresh fruit and vegetables in Costa Rica are abundant and tasty, so make sure you ask your host to serve you plenty of both. If you feel you need more food at breakfast or dinner, please ask them for more. It is not considered polite to go to the refrigerator to help yourself unless they indicate that it is O.K. However, most times you'll find your family gives you more than you can eat. If you're a weight-watcher, please don't hesitate to indicate that you can do with less.

Normally you will eat the same food as the family. Unless you have indicated special diet restrictions on your application form, you should not expect your family to make you special meals. (If you did not indicate this ahead of time, let the homestay coordinator know so that she can talk with your family about your needs.) If you can't live without your favorite type of food, we recommend you buy it in a local supermarket. These kinds of foods are normally imported and are very expensive by Costa Rican standards.

If for some reason you are having dinner elsewhere, please be courteous and notify your family of your change in plans ahead of time.

In Costa Rica, families often do not eat together. As a result, dinner does not necessarily have the social character it does in most European or North American homes, i.e., that of a family gathering. Although we have requested our families to share all meals with you, this may not always be possible, and as a result, you may find yourself eating alone from time to time. If you find yourself eating alone too often, please let us know so that we can make the appropriate changes. Sharing meals with your family is one of the best opportunities you will have to practice your Spanish and learn more about Costa Rican culture and values. We therefore encourage you to make the most of this opportunity.

Meals on Weekends

Breakfast and dinner will also be provided on the weekends. If you would like to change the hour of your meals in order to create more flexibility for activities and outings, please discuss this with your host family. If you have any problems, please report to the Homestay Coordinator.

Costa Ricans Are Early Risers

The daily routine of the people in Costa Rica will probably be a little different from what you are accustomed to. Daily life in Costa Rica starts very early: most people are up between 5:00 - 6:00 a.m. Consequently, many Costa Ricans go to bed between 8:30 - 10:00 p.m. If you come in late at night, please keep this fact in mind.

Personal Hygiene

Costa Ricans are accustomed to bathing daily and changing their clothes regularly and they try to always maintain a neat appearance. Meeting or exceeding these standards will be greatly appreciated.

Room-keeping & Laundry Service

Your family will keep your room and bathroom clean. To make things easier on your family, please help by keeping your room tidy. Your family will provide laundry service that includes changing your linens every week. It is important to know that women are sometimes expected to wash their own underwear. If your hosts do not explain this when you arrive, you can ask them to show you how and where you can wash them. Some families may offer to wash them for you. The rest of your clothes will be washed at least once a week. Be sure to ask about the family's schedule. If you travel before starting your homestay and arrive with dirty laundry in tow, please know that your host family is not obligated to wash these clothes for you. It is very important to talk with your family and either wash them yourself or offer to pay a small amount if they do it for you.

Hot Water

Due to the mild climate, homes in Costa Rica usually have hot water only in the shower. Many use an electric heating device for this purpose, so do not expect a steaming hot stream of water like you are accustomed to at home. Since these devices work through an instant heating process, the more you open the faucet, the colder the water gets. To activate the heating device a small flow of water is required. Fully open the faucet and then reduce the flow of water until you get an acceptable balance between temperature and flow. The discussion about how hot the water actually is goes on and on, but if the device is working, you will get a decent flow of warm water. If you feel the water temperature is unacceptable, talk to the family about the problem. If after this nothing improves, please talk to our homestay coordinator.

Keys

Your family will provide you with a key to the front door and one to the gate. Please feel free to come and go as you please. Of course, be considerate if you return home late at night, and always lock the door behind you. In the case that you lose your key, you may be asked to pay to relock your house. This is especially important if the keys are lost along with your ID that has your address. Please take special care with both of these items.

Family Telephone

Please note that all local calls in Costa Rica are time-charged, including those within the city of San José. Please take this into account and be considerate when using your family's telephone by using a phone card at all times. To make collect calls ("llamada a cobrar") or credit card calls ("llamada con tarjeta de credito"), dial 175 to get the operator. For calling card, long distance or collect calls, see the "Phone" section of this guide.

The local phone company (ICE) has an office in downtown San Jose where you can make international calls 24 hours a day by paying with your credit card. They also sell prepaid "colibri" phone cards for larger denominations that are designed specifically for tourists. ILISA keeps phone cards in stock as well.

Direct dial local and international calls can be made by use of money or local phone cards, which can be purchased at the front desk of ILISA and used at the phone there or at the pay phone in front of the school.

ILISA also rents cell phones, so speak to the enrollment coordinator if you are interest.

Another popular option is using Skype, which is a prepaid internet phone. If you do not have an account, please ask Crista, our enrollment coordinator for instructions about opening an account.

Guests

It is recommended, as a courtesy, to inform your family of any visitors that you might have. Under no circumstances are you allowed to have overnight guests.

Friendship

Every family is different, so each student will undergo a different experience. Some families are more sociable than others and because of this and the uniqueness of every student, relationships between the student and family can be quite different. Some families will include their student in their social activities, outings, etc., and some homestays can grow into a rewarding and lasting friendship. If you desire this type of relationship with your family, show them that you are interested in spending time with

them. If you desire more privacy and less interaction with your hosts, please let your family know or speak with the Homestay Coordinator.

Length of Stay

As a student you will stay with your host family for the length of the program. We frequently place our students with their families well ahead of their arrival. If you would like to stay with your family for a longer period of time after your planned departure, please report to the Homestay Coordinator right away.

The homestay cost covers payment to the family, a placement fee, administrative overhead, and fees or discounts to agents and universities. Families cannot accept payment from, or make direct arrangements with students. Please do not ask them to do so.

A Gift

You may have thought about bringing something for your future hosts as a nice gesture thanking them for their hospitality. Giving a gift to your host family is an optional gesture that you should not feel obliged to fulfill. The important thing to remember is that the symbolic value of the gift is much more important than the monetary value. Some suggestions: chocolates, a book of photos from home, a traditional food: cheese or wine. Dutchmen beware: Do not bring any "drop", "ticos" don't really seem to like it (the director does!).

Family Evaluation

We are often asked how we select our families and especially where we find such nice people. One explanation is that there are just an awful lot of nice people in Costa Rica who really enjoy receiving guests into their homes.

A key to maintaining such a fine group of host families is the constant evaluation of the families by our students. On your first Friday at ILISA you will receive an evaluation form. We kindly ask that you please fill it out completely. If there is anything you feel we should know about, please write it down on the form. Both positive and negative comments will allow us to maintain a well-selected group of families. All responses are confidential.

All families should provide you, at a minimum, with a quiet place to study, a small desk with sufficient light, a variety of good food, keys to the house, as well as take care of your laundry and make an effort to include you in the family activities. The rest is up to you!

Hours

ILISA is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. If you use e-mail/Internet in the afternoon, please wrap up

before this time so we can turn off the computers. Banks are open from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm, private banks are open long on an average until 6:00 pm. Bars open around noon and close around 2:00 am depending on the area of town. Stores typically open around 8:30 am and close between 7-9 pm. Also, depending on the area, you may find that many stores are closed on Sunday. Buses stop running around 10:30 pm. Taxis have surcharge after 10:00 pm.

Insurance Coverage

We recommend you check your insurance coverage before going abroad. A travel insurance package (medical/stolen) is not expensive and well worth it. It is recommended to purchase insurance that includes flight home in case of an emergency. At the least, this precaution will provide an extra piece of mind. To compare different plans check out, www.insuremytrip.com.

Internet

ILISA has its own free Internet café with 5 computers. Please report any computer trouble to the front desk immediately. Please DO NOT TRY to fix anything. Speed may not always be what you are used to but please remember that you are in the tropics.

Jazz

see Blues.

Junk to Bring

Please keep in mind that you can purchase most essential items here if you forget anything. However some brands might be more expensive so if you have a favorite, bring it along.

Musts: Film and camera equipment, sunscreen (SPF 15+), pocket alarm clock or watch, comfortable shoes, beach towel, soap/shampoo/toiletries, umbrella, comfortable clothes, dictionary, pen and paper, valid passport, money belt/internal pocket, sweater, rain poncho, sunglasses, insect repellent, sun hat, and a day pack.

Optional: CDs, snorkel and mask, aspirin, flashlight, hiking boots, ziploc bags, gortex parka and pants, small first aid kit.

Language Learning

Now that you will begin your study at ILISA shortly, we would like to tell you a little bit about the language learning process.

Learning a foreign language is a gradual process that takes time, persistence, and motivation. ILISA's role in this process is to create the ideal situation in which to learn. Apart from everything that

we provide for our students, the key factor to successful learning will be the effort that you put into the process. Successful language learning depends not only on aptitude, i.e. intellectual capacity, but on a student's desire and persistence also. You may have the potential to be a brilliant language learner, but if you fail to put effort into the process, chances are you will not learn very much.

Besides your persistence, another important trait that influences the learning process is an emotional one: your attitude. Research has shown that a positive attitude towards a country, its people, and its culture, helps language learners maintain their interest long enough to achieve language mastery.

Motivation plays a strong role in the success rate of students. For example, many people tend to do very well because they need Spanish for career purposes. Whatever your motivational purpose may be, understand that it will play a role in the success you have at learning another language.

What every student should understand is that like all long-term enterprises, chances for success in language learning are improved if you set realistic goals. An objective as vague as "I want to learn Spanish" is not specific enough. You cannot expect to be able to understand, speak, read, and write a foreign language after a relatively short period of study. Please understand that language learning entails various stages of achievement, from the simple, to the more complex. To achieve success at any given level requires a certain amount of practice. By setting modest, realistic objectives for yourself along the way, you can more easily keep your level of interest and motivation high.

Another important concept to keep in mind is to let errors work for you, not against you. Errors are an inevitable part of the learning process. Try to look at them as a potential source of information and as a way of improving your skills. It is very important to not let your fear of making mistakes interfere with your participation both in and outside of the classroom. Remember that language learning is a gradual process, which requires a lot of practice. This includes making errors and being corrected. Don't hold back and wait for that magic moment when you think you will be able to speak error free. Without practice, that moment will never come.

Yet another very important facet of language learning is practice. If you intend only to come to class during the week without making an attempt to continue with Spanish after school, you will quickly lose much of what you have gained. There are many different methods of practicing what you have learned. One of the best, of course, is to practice with a family, which is provided through our homestay program. Another is to take homework seriously and review the information that you have learned every night. Another, and perhaps the most enjoyable, is to go out as much as possible to practice what you have learned with native speakers of the language in a more spontaneous situation. Whatever method you

choose, make sure to practice the language as much as possible so that the things that you have studied during class will stay with you.

These are just a few, yet important insights on language learning. This information should help you to set reasonable objectives and avoid the disillusionment that may occur with a goal as vague as, "I want to learn Spanish". If you would like to know more about this subject, we recommend you check out the book: "How To Be a More Successful Language Learner" by Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson.

Laptop

If you want to bring your laptop and need Internet access, you need a network card. Under special circumstances we may be able to enable dial-up access from either ILISA or the homestay. Please check with the enrollment coordinator.

We also have wireless internet. However, it only works in some of the rooms in ILISA due to a big number of walls between different places. Please ask Crista where you can use wireless internet upon arrival.

Laundry

If you are staying with a host family, you are in luck. Host families will wash your clothes at least once a week for you. Also see the "Room-keeping & Laundry Service" section under Host Families.

If you are staying in a hotel, check with the manager about resources. If you are living on your own, ask the front desk for names and locations of laundry mats. You will not find the traditional coin-operated laundry mats but full-service establishments that will do everything for you for a small fee. Some laundry facilities include:

Martinizing – in San Pedro, 2224-4183

Lava Más – in San Pedro, 2225-1645

Sixaola – in Plaza del Sol, 2234-0278

Levels

see Language Learning.

Luggage

First, make sure you tag all of your bags before checking them. If your bags do not arrive in San Jose, be sure to file a report and leave the phone numbers of your homestay and of ILISA (2280-0700) with the airline.

Lunch

Our open-air restaurant, "Entre Amigos," can provide you with healthy, delicious lunches. It is convenient and very affordable. The atmosphere can provide you with a relaxing place to enjoy your lunch

and get to know your fellow students and teachers. Coffee and snacks are also available starting at 7:30 am.

In addition, there are a great number of restaurants in San Pedro. There are many places to eat around the University of Costa Rica, on Avenida Central, or on one of its many side streets. Whatever your budget or taste for food may be, you will have no trouble finding a restaurant. When you first arrive, check with your fellow students as to where the good places are.

Restaurants, hotels and nightclubs are required to include a 15% sales tax and 10% service charge in all bills. Although the 10% service charge is included in your bill, it is not uncommon to add an extra 5 - 10% gratuity for good service. If you get a menu and it says "I.V.I." somewhere at the bottom, sales tax is included. If it reads "más I.V." you still have to add it to the prices listed in the menu.

Machismo

Like in most places in the world, machismo (sexism) is a part of the Costa Rican social structure. While the manifestations of machismo are sometimes more obvious here than in other places, the underlying structures are probably similar to those that you experience at home.

An unaccompanied woman will probably hear the flirtatious comments many Tico men will call out, such as *mi amor*, *machita*, or *guapa*. It's annoying, but not threatening. (And the men who are making the comment really do intend it to be a compliment.) The best policy is to ignore them and keep walking.

As a general rule, women should try to be more formal in their interactions with men they encounter in everyday situations (taxi drivers, shopkeepers, etc.) as sometimes men mistake informality with an interest in forming a deeper relationship. For the same reason, it's also a good idea to ride in the back seat of a cab instead of next to the driver.

Mail

If friends and family want to mail you letters, tell them to use our direct mailing address: ILISA, Apartado 1001-2050 San Pedro, Costa Rica. Inform your friends about the length of your stay, and the approximate time a letter takes to arrive here (from Europe sometimes up to three weeks, from the US about 1-2 weeks). If you leave the school but are staying in Costa Rica and would like to continue using ILISA's P.O. Box for awhile, please inform the office staff so they will keep incoming letters and faxes for you. "Return to Sender" does not work in Costa Rica so ILISA cannot return mail unless it has been paid for in advance.

Please don't use ILISA's Miami address. This mail forwarding service is used for letters only and is not free. Sending even the smallest packages to our

Miami address will result in a charge of at least \$ 15 US, most of it going to the mail forwarding company. That's excluding customs duties/handling if applicable.

Generally we suggest that you discourage friends or relatives from sending packages while you are here, as they are likely to be tied up in customs for some time. Also the taxes charged on items sent to Costa Rica can be outrageous and the package may not arrive in its entirety.

If you want to mail letters or postcards, the post office in San Pedro can be found in the American(Outlet) Mall-the ground floor(about 3 blocks from ILISA). The central post office in San Jose is located on Calle Central, between Avenida 1 and 3. We can also mail your letters for you.

Maps

Finding an accurate map of San Jose is a difficult task. Most tourist centers and also ILISA has maps in stock. However, a good and complete map is difficult to find. Maps of the National Parks can also be sold upon request. In addition, the reception has copies of city maps of San Jose free of cost. For more complete information and more specific maps, you can consult **The New Key to Costa Rica, Costa Rica guide by Lonely Planet**, or any of several other travel guides.

Medical Services

If you have an emergency, you can go to "urgencias" (urgent care) at the Clinica Bíblica in San José at Calle Central y Primera y Avenida 14. Though it's an emergency room, the wait is usually short. No appointment is required and the cost of a visit is comparable to an office visit. "La Farmacia" (pharmacy) here also can provide you with safe, inexpensive vaccinations.

Addresses and phone numbers of several doctors and dentists and the major hospitals are available through our office staff. Please ask for suggestions.

Money Exchange

We do not recommend changing money with "moneychangers" (guys on the street offering to change money) at the airport or anywhere. These people are sometimes using counterfeit bills and are notorious for ripping people off.

The most common place to change money in Costa Rica is at any one of the banks; just be sure to bring your passport and be prepared to wait in a long line. As a student at ILISA, there is a much easier way to change your money. We provide this service to students twice a week – Monday and Thursday. The process is the following: give us your traveler's checks or your cash between 7:30 and 10:15 a.m. Traveler's checks should just be signed twice: don't fill out any name! At approximately 12 noon we will have your colones waiting for you. Please make a note of

this schedule since we will be unable to change your money at other times during the week. The school charges a small commission to cover the bank's commission and our expenses as your checks remain frozen in our account for about 2 weeks!

Credit and debit card users can receive cash at several of the banks or ATM's (cajero automatico) here in the San Jose area. Your best bets are at the Banco de San José ATM in the 3rd floor of the mall and at the A Toda Hora (ATH) machine located at the Outlet Mall three blocks north of ILISA. American Express card holders should contact the local representatives at the Banco de San José in down town San José.

To pay for you classes, ILISA accepts US dollars, colones, traveler's checks, personal checks drawn against a US bank and wire transfers from US or European accounts. ILISA also accepts credit cards, though credit card payment is subject to our regular prices, 6% higher than our discounted cash prices. For your convenience, our booking confirmations reflect our discounted cash prices as most students pay with cash, traveler's checks and personal checks. Checks should be made payable to: "ILISA Servicios Educativos SA".

Costa Rica has bank notes in 1000, 2000, 5000 and 10000 colón denominations. The most common coins denominations are: 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100 and 500.

As of December 2008, the exchange rate was 555 colones for 1 USD. The rate does change slowly due to the devaluation of the colón. Also, bring only US dollars because it can be difficult or impossible to change other currencies, including Euros. Make sure dollar bills are not ripped or stained, for the banks will not change those.

Museums

Also see "Art Museums" under Art.

Serpentario – This museum houses snakes and reptiles and is open on weekdays from 9 am-6 pm and weekends from 10am-5pm, \$4 US.

Museo de los Niños – Hands-on exhibits for children of a variety of themes including science, music, and children in Costa Rica. Hours: Tuesday-Friday 8am-3pm and weekends from 10 am-4pm, \$5 adults and discounts for children.

Museo de Ciencias Naturales – A good resource to identify some species that may be seen in the wild during one's visit to Costa Rica. Open 8am-4pm Monday through Saturday and 9am-5pm on Sunday, \$2 US.

Museos de Insectos – Claimed to be the only insect museum in Central America. Open from 1-5pm on weekdays, \$1.50 US.

National Parks

For complete information on the national parks, get yourself a copy of the "New Key to Costa Rica" or get the book "The National Parks of Costa Rica", available at the major bookstores in San Jose For more information you can also call the National Park Service at 192, or stop by the office located on Calle 25 between Avenidas 8 and 10.

Park entrance fees vary, from voluntary donations to as much as \$7. It is no longer necessary to purchase tickets ahead of time.

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and magazines are available in English, Spanish, and other languages at bookstores, supermarkets, newsstands, and other outlets. Some to check out are:

The Bookshop in Plaza Del Sol. Another English bookstore with many magazines, books and newspapers, including the USA Today, Herald Tribune, New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal.

Night Life

If you want to go to a theater, movie or musical performance, get yourself a copy of "La Nacion", the local newspaper, and look in the "VIVA" section to find out what's happening. Thursday's La Nacion contains a weekend entertainment section. The English language newspaper, "The Tico Times" (published on Fridays, and for sale at most newspaper stands and the ILISA front desk), also has an events calendar for your entertainment.

For safety's sake, we recommend that you take taxis home after about 8 or 9pm.

The "weekend" starts on Wednesday night, so if you like going out and dancing all night long, San José has something for you. For a cold beer and good bocas after class, check out Rockolas in the American Mall. Also nearby is Jazz Café, which presents live music. It has several discos, bars, and restaurants. Visit La Esmeralda at Ave. 2, Calle 5-7 to listen to mariachi bands starting after 10 PM. You can also drop by here after the discotheques close. Finally, another place to meet the local crowd is Rio in Los Yoses, 150 m. west of the Burger King. Your fellow students will be the best source of information. Most large downtown hotels also have casinos.

Passports

We strongly recommend you have a copy of the page with your picture and the page with the date of entry and carry that with you at all times. You don't need your original as long as you have these two pages with you and another ID with picture.

People at ILISA

During your stay in Costa Rica you will meet quite a few people. Let's introduce some of the people you will meet at ILISA:

In the office:

Here you will find Andrea Cordero, Ana Lorena Alfaro and Crista Szilagyi. Andrea Cordero is our Receptionist; Ana Lorena is our Deputy Director in Costa Rica. Crista is our enrollment coordinator as well as our homestay coordinator; Crista and Ana Lorena speak English while Andrea Cordero will be able to help you practice your Spanish.

The Spanish department:

Ana Lorena is ILISA's Program Director and is responsible for organizing all classes, which includes placing students in the appropriate level for his or her abilities. If you would like to visit your professional counterpart, need specialized vocabulary during your private classes, talk to Ana Lorena. Also, if you have any questions and/or comments regarding your classes or teachers, please don't hesitate to talk with Ana Lorena anytime.

The Director:

He was christened with the unusual name Thorwald Westmaas. If this doesn't sound like a tico name, your guess is right. The name is Scandinavian and the person is Dutch. He's been living in Costa Rica since 1987 and is the founder of ILISA. He is in Panama at the moment as we have opened a centre there as well in 2005.

The teachers:

Our teachers here at ILISA are all well-trained, experienced and enthusiastic individuals. On one of the bulletin boards at ILISA's entrance you will find the names and pictures of all of our teachers. They have all been working with ILISA for quite some time. Most have been at ILISA over 10 years! We are confident that you will enjoy your classes with them.

Personal Safety

Like most large cities, San José has its share of petty theft. In most cases it is non-confrontational; sometimes you don't even realize what happened until after the fact.

If you use common sense and take the normal precautions required in any major city, there is no reason to worry. A few tips:

- Don't wear a lot of jewelry or carry around valuables. Leave them in your family's home.
- If you carry a daypack, put your valuables in the largest pocket because this tends to be a safer place to keep things from pickpockets.
- Hold on firmly to your purse.
- If you set your bag down, try to maintain physical contact with it (i.e. put your foot on the strap).
- Keep money in front rather than back pockets,
- Do not flash around large amounts of money.
- Be aware; try to look in control.
- If you have a rental car, take the same precautions you would at home. Park in parking lots and always lock the car. Try not to leave valuables in the car or trunk, especially overnight.

Pharmacies

Costa Ricans seem to take pills for just anything. "Farmacias" are everywhere and many medicines that usually require a prescription in the US and in Europe are available over the counter and are fairly inexpensive. In spite of this easy access to medications, we still recommend that you consult a doctor rather than self-prescribing. A word of caution – when speaking of prescription or non-prescription drugs, use the word "medicina." The word drug (in Spanish, "droga") only means illegal drugs.

Phones

There are public phones for use at ILISA's front desk, as well as just outside ILISA. Phone cards are sold at ILISA's reception. Additionally there are public telephones throughout San José and San Pedro. There are three types of public phones. Coin operated phones accept silver (not gold) 5, 10 and 20 colón coins. Set the coin in the slot on top of the phone, and then dial; the coin will drop down when a connection has been made. Extra coins set in the slot will be used only as needed. Ignore the loud beeps at the beginning of the call; that's just the way some public phones work. "Chip" phones require a phone card with a computer chip; these cards can be purchased at pharmacies, shops, supermarkets and other locations. Newer "Colibrí" phones operate with pre-paid phone cards in which you dial in a code located on the back of the card. Colibrí cards also work at regular phones. ILISA stocks Colibrí cards in smaller denominations for local calls and in larger denominations for international calling.

For North Americans, the easiest alternative for international calling is bringing a calling card from home. The three companies with local access numbers are AT&T, MCI and Sprint. Other companies' cards will not work. You will not be able to use your calling card to call third countries. (For example, you can't call Peru from Costa Rica with your AT&T card). Also it is important to remember that

1-800 numbers are not free dialing from Costa Rica and are charged the regular international rate.

The other easy alternative is calling collect. Make arrangements to pay people back when you return.

Because it is often cheaper to call from North America to Costa Rica than the opposite, some students will buy a phone card to call home, simply say, "call me back" when calling then wait for home to call them using a cheaper rate.

AT&T local access number: 0-8000-114-114

MCI local access number: 0-8000-122-222

Sprint local access number: 0-8000-130-123

Collect to Denmark 0-8000-451-045

Collect to Germany: 0-8000-491-049

Collect/Calling Card to Canada: 0-8000-151-161

AT&T Canada: 0-8000-152-000

Collect: 175 to dial an operator

Placement Test

See First Day.

Pocket Money

It is possible to live very cheaply in Costa Rica however how much money you will need will depend on your lifestyle. A good meal can be found between 2,500 to 5,000 colones (5.00 to 9 US\$). If you are interested in participating in the nightlife scene, it is also possible to do this cheaply – 10,000 colones a night is sufficient. Again, when traveling, it is recommended to bring enough cash to carry you through the trip. This amount will depend on your activities and the level of luxury you desire. Around 50,000 colones per weekend trip can be sufficient.

Preparing for an Immersion Program

Studying at a language school abroad is one of the best ways to improve your language skills. To get the best results, you should prepare yourself before you leave. For example, exercises that improve your vocabulary are well worth the time and effort. If you are a beginner, this will help you feel more comfortable once your total immersion program begins.

Here are a few good ideas:

- Find someone who is a native speaker of the language you want to learn. Ask this person to make a tape-recording of a chosen text, and listen to it over and over until you know it well enough to recite it along with the speaker. This will help you to become accustomed to recognizing certain words that you already know in writing.
- Read your text and/or listen to your tape right before you go to sleep. This allows you to subconsciously work on the new material while you are sleeping.
- Enroll in a beginner's course at a local language

school or education center. This will give you a good introduction to the language before you go abroad to study. It also allows you the opportunity to decide if you really like your chosen language.

If you are an absolute beginner, we recommend that you buy a small phrase book, preferably one with an accompanying tape, and try to learn 20 or 30 useful phrases that you will need all the time. Most phrase books contain an introductory section where you can find the little phrases and expressions that make communication easier: "please, thank you, excuse me, I'm sorry, can you help? I'd like some..., do you have ...? how much is...? yes, no", and so on.

Master a short list of phrases like this, and you will be surprised how many simple situations you can deal with. Expressions of this sort will not solve all your communication problems, but they will facilitate basic conversation.

If you are a more advanced learner, you need more complex advice because you aren't learning the language from scratch - it's more often a case of a building on a foundation that you have already attained. Our advice in this case is to learn as many common words as you can before you leave for your study trip. When you learn a foreign language in your own country you lack a great deal of "everyday" vocabulary. This can cause a real shock when you go abroad and attempt to talk to native speakers.

You can't really be functional in a foreign language until you know 2,000 - 3,000 words well. That's roughly the same number of words that a four or five-year-old child knows - enough to cope with most everyday situations.

For most purposes, there are lots of ways you can build up your vocabulary before you leave for a trip. Most good book stores stock children's picture books with basic vocabularies in the major Western languages. You can use these to learn simple words that you are likely to need. If you already have a rough idea of the grammar of the language you are learning, then another good idea is to buy a newspaper in the language you are planning to learn, and work through the headlines, using a dictionary.

You should cut out, or copy down any headline that contains a word you don't know. Keep them in a little notebook, and review them three or four times a day. This will give you a basic vocabulary referring to things that are currently in the news - just the sort of things that people are likely to want to talk to you about. You can make some of this vocabulary active if you systematically practice productive tasks using the words you've just learned.

Buy a small pack of picture postcards, and each day spend a few minutes with each card identifying the things you can see in them (in the foreign language of course). At first, you might find that you can only list a few objects, but with practice, you will be able to string together a couple of simple phrases.

For some of you, a study trip abroad isn't so much about learning a new language, or about

building on a foundation. It's simply a case of brushing up on a language you once knew quite well, but have since forgotten. In cases like these, you can often reactivate much of what you knew in a short period of intensive reading. When you stop using a language, the words you have learned don't disappear from your mind, they just lurk in your subconscious. Reading will reactivate many of the things you once knew. So, a few hours of serious reading will allow you to remember words that you thought were forgotten.

It helps even more if you have a book that you know fairly well and perhaps enjoy reading. Cartoon strips, or children's books seem to be particularly useful for this, as they usually have good illustrations and simple story lines. Cartoon strips in particular are usually written in dialogue that you can use for many situations in which you may find yourself. Also, any text of reasonable length, say 20 or 30 pages, will contain a large vocabulary. Most of the vocabulary will be frequently used words that you will need to know yourself, and be able to use automatically while abroad.

Many language courses abroad concentrate more on conversation skills and grammar than on vocabulary. That's fine if you start with a sizable vocabulary, but if you don't, you may find yourself often stuck for a simple word in the middle of a public situation, which can be embarrassing.

Once you have a good basic vocabulary, most of what happens your language class becomes simple: grammar exercises are just a matter of slotting familiar words into new environments, and conversation is just a matter of effectively using words you already know.

Like anything else, a good start is half the job. Please help yourself by being well prepared before you start an immersion program.

Prescription Medicine

See Pharmacies.

¿Qué?

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask.

Quetzal

A sighting of the dazzling quetzal bird is one of the most sought-after experiences in Costa Rica. The male quetzal sports bright green feathers on his wings, which are set off by bright crimson on his stomach and a white underside of the tail. Witnessing this bird in flight is quite a sight. These birds are most common in Monteverde and areas in the south.

Recognition & Memberships

ILISA is a member of ACTFL, IACET, ASTD, AmCham, NASP, NAYRE, NASSP, NAESP, and AANC.

Refunds

No refunds are made for any portion of classes or homestay once the program has begun unless there is some case of dissatisfaction with the program or services as stated in our satisfaction guarantee. All cancellations or changes in program must be submitted in writing and may incur a 20% cancellation fee.

Religious Services

Baptist - The International Baptist Church of Costa Rica is located at Faro del Caribe, San Francisco de Dos Ríos (286-1755).

Catholic - Saint Mary's Chapel, adjacent to the Sheraton Herradura Hotel in San Jose, has an English mass Sunday at 4 p.m. The San Rafael de Escazú Church holds an English mass Saturday at 5 p.m.

Episcopal - English services are Sunday at 8:30 a.m. at the Church of the Good Shepherd (Avenida 4, Calles 3/5-costado norte del colegio de señoritas; 2222-1560)

Jewish - Reform: Bilingual services are held Friday at 8 p.m. at Congregation B'nei Israel (2232-9626).

Conservative: Synagogue Shaare Zion (Calle 22 bis, Avenida 1; 2233-9222) has services Friday at 5:30 p.m.

Methodist - Sunday services are at 9a.m. or 10:00 Am with bilingual/English services on Wednesday and Friday (Avenida Central, Calles 9/11 (2222-0360).

Rip Tides

Many of Costa Rica's beaches have riptides, strong currents that can drag swimmers out to sea. A riptide occurs when water that has been dumped on the shore by strong waves forms a channel back out to open water. These channels have strong currents. If you get caught in a riptide, you can't escape the current by swimming toward shore--the equivalent of swimming upstream in a river. To break free of the current, swim parallel to shore, and use the energy of the waves to help you get back to the beach. It's nothing serious, just remain calm and you'll be good.

Shopping

Buy coffee. If you're a coffee drinker or if you know some coffee drinkers (we guess that includes everyone), then be sure to stock up on fresh-roasted coffee beans before you head home. Café Britt is the coffee you'll see sold in hotels and souvenir shops all over the country. Sure, it's good coffee, but it's also overpriced. If you go into the central market in downtown San José or in grocery stores anywhere in the country, you'll find coffee at much lower prices. Just be sure you're buying whole beans. Costa Rican grinds are much finer than U.S. grinds and often have sugar mixed right in to the coffee. Costa Rica also produces its own coffee liqueur (Café Rica), including a crème liqueur (Salicsa), both of which are quite inexpensive. These are best purchased in a liquor store or a grocery store. Salsa Lizano, a flavorful green sauce is another item worth bringing home with you.

Costa Rica is not known for its handicrafts, though it does have a town, Sarchí, which is best known as the home of the colorfully painted Costa Rican oxcart, reproductions of which are manufactured in various scaled-down sizes. There is also a lot of furniture made in Sarchí. You can also buy crafts closer to school in Moravia (a neighborhood north of San Pedro), in the International Crafts Market in Curridabat (east of San Pedro) or in the Central Market downtown.

If you buy something and, after buying, you realize it was not what you wished for or that the product is damaged, the common practice in Costa Rica is to ask for a similar product for the same price as a refund. Costa Rican shops rarely refund money.

Smoking

ILISA is a non-smoking building except parts of the open-air terrace. Please take fellow students into account and refrain from smoking if at all possible.

Spanish Language

The people of Costa Rica speak Spanish with one of the most neutral accents of any country in Latin America. This clarity makes learning the language easier leading to Costa Rica being one of the top choices for people wanting to learn Spanish.

Sports Viewing

If you just have to watch that NFL Monday night football game, or your weekly hit of boxing, basketball, baseball or soccer you can certainly find central watering holes where you can belly up to a television set. In San Pedro, try sports bar **All Star** in front of Mall San Pedro. In San José, there is a veritable plethora. Try **Rockolas(Outlet Mall)**, **Tiny's Tropical Bar** (Calle 9/11, Ave.2), **Nashville South** (Calle 5, Ave. 1/3) or the **Holiday Inn** bar (Calle 5/7, Ave.10, second floor), all centrally located. There are also sports books with numerous TVs the casinos in

central San José. But be careful – we're sure you'd rather spend that money at the beach than on a basketball wager.

Costa Rica is a huge soccer playing nation and it's cheap and easy to go see a good quality live professional game. Check out La Nacion for details.

Telephone

See Phone and 'family telephone' under Host Families. Also see "Cell Phone Rental" .

Time

All of Costa Rica is on Central Standard Time, which is six hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). During daylight savings time in the U.S. (late March to late October) Costa Rica is on Mountain Time.

Tour Desk

ILISA offers you the possibility of reserving your tours through the school. We negotiated some very good rates on hotels, cars and weekend tours to all of the popular locations here in Costa Rica. So, when you arrive here, remember to say hello and let Andrea or Crista help you with your travel plans.

Transportation

Pedestrians

Many students find it enjoyable to walk around San Pedro and San José, especially when the weather is nice. It is important to keep in mind that pedestrians are very low on the food chain. Be careful. As one guide put it, "Local custom is that cars do not yield to pedestrians." Another: "If you can drive in Costa Rica, you can drive anywhere." Using a bike in Costa Rica is difficult, due to the roads and the traffic.

Taxis

Costa Rica has an abundance of taxis and the cost is rather inexpensive. During the dry season, you will have less trouble getting a cab. Most Costa Ricans prefer to use the bus system during these months. In the rainy season it becomes much more difficult to get a cab. This means that instead of being able to get a cab right away, you may have to wait several minutes. If you want to have a taxi pick you up at your house it is possible (be prepared to call the taxi company several times). While this option will work, it is much quicker and easier to go out to the nearest busy street and flag a taxi down.

Officially, taxi drivers are required to use their meters. If your driver doesn't turn the meter on, tell him "la maria por favor". As long as you use bills of 1000 or less, the taxi drivers should have no problem making change. The average fare from ILISA to a homestay is less than \$2-5 US.

When you get ready to return home, it is advisable to call a taxi to get back to the airport for departure. Every now and then, the host family will offer to take you to the airport. If this is the case, we suggest you offer them the same amount of money as you would pay for a taxi, approximately \$18 US-\$25. We can also arrange for someone to pick you up at your home and take you to the airport for that price.

If you have ever taken a taxi in Costa Rica you know that it is best to have some knowledge of Spanish. Since addresses and street names are generally non-existent (or not regularly used, as stated previously), you have to be able to describe in Spanish where you want the taxi driver to take you. Also, if you have to call for a cab by phone, you will need to know how to give your exact location. Memorize these phrases and you will find it easier to call a cab or arrive at your destination a little easier:

Libre	Available or free cab
Ocupado	Unavailable cab
Lleveme a ...	Take me to
Pare aquí	Stop here
Pare allí	Stop there
Pare en la esquina	Stop at the corner
A la derecha	Take a right
A la izquierda	Take a left
Una cuadra or cien metros	A block
Cincuenta Metros	One-half block
Norte, Sur, Este, Oeste	North, South, East, West
En el cruce	At the intersection
Diagonal a ...	Diagonal to
Al lado de	Next to
A la vuelta de la esquina	Around the corner
Frente a...	Across the street from
La proxima calle	The next street
Directo	Straight ahead
Espereme	Wait for me
María	Taxi meter in Costa Rica
Use la Maria por favor	Please use the meter
Cuanto cobra usted por llevarme a...	How much to take me to...
Cuanto le debo	How much do I owe you
Quedese con el vuelto	Keep the change
Usted me está cobrando mucho más	You are charging me too much

Buses

Traveling in San Jose is fairly simple using the bus system. Once you have learned the names of the various suburbs, you will find that using the bus system is easy and cheap. The typical bus fare ranges from 150-500 Colones (less than \$ 1.00 US). You don't need exact change on buses, but bills of 5000 won't be accepted and if you pay with a 2000 colon bill, you may experience bus driver's revenge - a pound of small coins. Throughout the city there are quite a few bus stops and the buses stop frequently, so you won't have to wait too long to catch a bus. Most buses start running at approximately 5 a.m. and stop at 10 - 11 p.m.

Most of our students tour the country every weekend in order to see as much of Costa Rica as possible (bring your weekend bag!). A good and cheap way to travel is by bus. From San Jose, buses will take you almost anywhere in the country for a low price. For the major cities, buses leave approximately every hour. Costa Rica's Tourist Board (the ICT), located under the Plaza de la Cultura (next to the National Theater in downtown San Jose), has a list of all bus schedules, which is updated regularly. ILISA also has a listing.

Final note: It is always wise to purchase bus or plane tickets in advance for the more popular destinations. This is the only sure way to guarantee you a spot!

Planes

Two airlines, SANSА and Nature Air, offer flights to many domestic destinations for around \$50-150 US one way. We can help you make reservations. Buy your ticket right away because both companies have a reputation for "losing" reservations that are not paid for.

Driving

Although buses are cheap and convenient, they are not the most comfortable way in which to travel. If you don't mind driving, you may consider renting a car with some of your fellow students. Be advised that during the tourist season, advance reservations are a must. Contact our travel desk manager or receptionist for help with car rentals.

The way ticos drive is in sharp contrast to their normally peaceful nature. Driving appears to be one of the few accepted ways in which they can vent their anger and frustration. This should not deter you from exploring the country side, just drive with a little more caution than you are accustomed to. When traveling by car be sure to have a valid driver's license, credit card, and passport. Rental companies will deliver cars to ILISA free of charge upon request, saving you the time and money of a taxi ride to their offices.

Travel Documents

When traveling with a passport, citizens of the United States, Canada, and most Latin American and European countries are entitled to stay in Costa Rica for 90 days. They must enter the country with at least \$300 US and departure ticket. Citizens of some Latin American, Asian, African, and East European countries must obtain a visa from a Costa Rican consulate and pay a deposit upon entering the country, refundable when they leave. Check with the consulate nearest you for the latest information.

US citizens can enter the country, purchasing a tourist card valid for 30 days upon arrival, by presenting two forms of identification, one of which must have a photo. (Acceptable ID's are a driver's license, birth certificate, social security card, and voter registration card.)

If you have overstayed your tourist visa, you will need to pay a fine of about \$30 US on top of your airport tax. You will also be charged around \$1.50 US for each month or part of a month that you stayed without a valid tourist card.

Always carry a copy of your ID. We recommend **you don't carry your passport** with you. Get a free copy of it made at ILISA that includes the page showing the date of entry. Don't go anywhere without identification!

Ultra Violet Rays

The tropical sun in Costa Rica is no joke. Take a trip to the beach and walk about for two hours without sunscreen and you will be sorry. We have seen the most hardened tanners come back from the beaches red, hurting, and with a humbled expression on their faces. Be warned that #8 sun-block at times simply isn't enough. #15 will still allow enough tanning rays to sneak through to give you that healthy tanned look as is recommended even for veteran tanners.

University Credit

Students participating in ILISA's Spanish courses may earn 3-12 undergraduate semester hours or 3-9 graduate semester hours in Spanish through an arrangement with the University of South Florida (USF). Credit is available at all levels, from beginning Spanish to upper-level courses (no graduate credit yet).

Vaccinations

No vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica at the moment. Check with your local health department for recommendations.

Variety of Teachers

During your stay at ILISA you will have a different teacher every week. This allows you to experience different voices, accents, and personalities. While your teachers will change, the methodology used will not! Teachers meet at the end of each week to coordinate the changing of the groups.

After you have been here awhile, you may develop a preference for a certain teacher (especially if you are taking private lessons). We will try to honor your requests whenever scheduling permits it.

Vegetarians

If you are a vegetarian or vegan and are doing a homestay please be sure to indicate these special dietary needs on your Application Form. See the

'Meals' section under Host Families. Our families are used to accommodating these needs. There are some vegetarian restaurants in the area ("Comida para Sentir"-one block north from the Church), others that are "vegetarian friendly" and others that aren't at all. The closest and tastiest is "El Restuarante Vegetariano," just five blocks from ILISA. Open Daily 11 AM – 7 PM.

Visas

see entry/exit

Water

The water in Costa Rica is safe to drink throughout most of the country. There are a few places that are a little uncertain, such as the beach areas of the Caribbean. In these cases, it is wise to play it safe and drink bottled drinks and avoid using ice.

Weekend Activities

As well as speaking with Andrea, the next best thing we can recommend is getting a copy of one of the guidebooks on Costa Rica. This will help you generate ideas and give information on how to proceed. As we mentioned earlier, the "New Key to Costa Rica" is good, as well as the Lonely Planet, Let's Go or Moon's Handbook guides on Costa Rica. We also sell at the front desk "Exploring Costa Rica," a guide written by the staff of the Tico Times, all Costa Rican residents. Staff or other students will also be a good source of information and feedback. And of course teachers – but in Spanish only ☺.

Z Last Word

Airport pick-up

Although we or our host families and drivers always check your arrival time before leaving for the airport to pick you up, there is a slight possibility that we may get caught in a traffic jam or that something unforeseen may happen.

In the unlikely event that you don't find anybody waiting for you ... don't despair! Just stand outside the exit doors with your luggage and wait for about 15 minutes while scanning the crowd and looking for the ILISA sign with your name on it. Try not to stand in the middle of a crowd because it will be harder for us to spot you. Do not stay inside the building because we are not allowed to enter it, and this would make it impossible for us to find you. If after 20 minutes nobody has shown up yet, we suggest you call the school (2280-0700). If on the weekend, please try our on-call cell phone at 8825.2089. You can also try Tano (8395-7296/2224-4832) or Edwin (8848-2991), the folks who most of our airport pickups. In case nobody answers, call the host family. Normally these actions will not be necessary.

Please don't take a taxi without informing anybody because you can be sure somebody is on his or her way to pick you up. In case your luggage is lost and you have to fill out the baggage claim forms, have a look outside and tell the person waiting for you that you have arrived but need to fill out some forms.

Now DON'T WORRY...99.9% of the time everything goes smoothly. These notes are not meant to make you concerned, but to assure you that even if things don't go smoothly at first, there's always a happy end in sight!

¡HASTA PRONTO!