



From A to Z

2022-2023

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

In Costa Rica:

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Activities

ILISA offers a cultural program with between one and three afternoon activities every week. The most popular is the weekly happy hour that occurs every week in a local bar near ILISA. Also featured are weekly dance classes 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 such as museums, central market and more.

Also, it is very common for students to plan events independently such as going to the [Teatro Nacional](#) to see a show (we highly recommend the "Teatro al Mediodía"), taking classes at a dance school (Merecumbé), afternoon coffee breaks, or an evening movie.

Addresses

Finding your way around in downtown San José may seem a bit confusing at first. 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, technology is now our friend and using apps such as google maps or Waze would be very useful. If you don't have roaming service while in Costa Rica we recommend to download the map of San Jose and use it online on google maps. With these apps is very easy and unexpensive to get everywhere without getting lost. Regarding the address of ILISA, 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. [Here our location](#) or just look for us on google as ILISA Educational Experiences.

Airport pick-up charge

If you require airport pickup & transfer it is included. The airport return is \$35, in the other hand if you take uber back the cost might be between \$12 and \$15 depending on the time. 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. 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, Ave del Paraíso, Tairona Apartments. Or most of our students who prefer an apartment go directly to [Airbnb](#). There are many options around the area, also you can check with your enrollment coordinator for our apartments (we have 2 apartments located in Los Yoses available for students).

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. At immigration they will require your intended address in Costa Rica, please bring your host family address, hotel name or Airbnb address at hand.

After passing immigration, go 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. **Do not stop to exchange money or buy Sim cards inside the airport.** 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). There is free wifi at the airport that you use to communicate with the ILISA coordinator or with the driver using WhatsApp (this app is very popular and we recommend that you install it before travelling to Costa Rica)

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. You will discover many options available every weekend that you can attend.

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 this website for more activities [Agenda Cultural Costa Rica](#) [Tico Times Art and Culture](#)

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. [Theaters in San José](#). Admission is usually between \$6.00 to \$20.00. Generally, performances are held Thursday through Sunday. When there are suitable works playing.

Films

North American movies dominate the screens in Costa Rica. If you are interested in foreign films, fantastic exceptions to this rule are the [Sala Garbo](#) located in Paseo Colón. Sala Garbo offers excellent international films with Spanish subtitles

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 Moderno**.

[Museo de Arte Costarricense](#)
[Museo de Oro](#)
[Museo Jade](#)
[Museo Nacional](#)

NOTE! Some museums apply a discount for ILISA students with student ID

Associations and Clubs

[Lion's Club](#)
[Rotary Club](#)

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 sometimes, they may not accept your card. Because of this, it is recommended to always have some cash before leaving the city when traveling to smaller towns. Credit cards are very well accepted nowadays even in smaller stores and restaurants. 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. Some popular places with the students of the University of Costa Rica include: Caccio's, Mundo Loco and Terra U. These are all located next to the University. Other popular nightlife sights include Escazú where there are many bars and nice restaurants you should try.

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 and reasonably priced hotels 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 enrollment coordinator will help you make your arrangements.

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 \$10 to \$30 round trip). Download the bus itinerary [here](#)

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/uber 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 4pm. 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

Staying connected in Costa Rica with your cell phone is entirely doable. With mostly 4G coverage (5G in some locations), you can expect your non-Costa Rica smartphone to keep you connected. Depending on how you plan to use your smartphone, you can keep costs low. Making and receiving calls in Costa Rica should be no problem except in the mountains or the most remote areas.

International Plan: Sign up with your service provider before you leave home for an international plan. Depending on your provider, a flat daily or monthly charge will pair you with a Costa Rican provider. Usually, the plan provides for a set number of minutes and data per day. For example, Verizon has 2 international plans, a daily charge of \$10/day for unlimited access or \$70/month for more limited voice and data access.

Local SIM card: You can unlock your phone before coming to Costa Rica and buy a local SIM card once you arrive. Local SIM cards usually come loaded with minutes, and you can purchase additional minutes separately. At the outlet mall you can get a SIM card for \$2.

Certificates/diplomas

At the end of your program, ILISA will give you a certificate stating starting and ending dates, number of hours. 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. 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 and 15 minutes 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 your 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 and rain jacket! 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 25-30°C/78-85 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!

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, you can check the [exchange rate online](#). ILISA offers exchange service;

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. In addition, you will have to pay transportation to the airport. (We can arrange for one of ILISA's drivers to take you for \$35 or you can take uber for about \$12-\$15 depending on the time)

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: (+506) 2280-0700. 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 1500-2500 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 have had to enforce this rule.

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 [online here](#)

Emergency Numbers

In case of an emergency during working hours, contact the ILISA staff at 506-2280-0700. On the weekends, try our on-call cell phone at +506-6278-7058 (Hellen).

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 (Colombia). These islands are very safe and fun. They are a frequent tourist stop for Costa Ricans who want to get away for a weekend. Also Panama city or Granada Nicaragua can be perfect destinations for one weekend.

If you don't leave the country, and you overstay the 90-day limit, you will be required to pay a fine. 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 and we will be happy to 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.

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.

Please arrive at 7.45 a.m. on the day you are scheduled to begin classes. This is also a great moment to pay your course costs (if you have a remaining balance).

In the meantime, one of our instructors, 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 to your enrolment coordinator or to the program director, 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 10a.m. coffee break. If only a few new students start school, you will start class at approximately 8:45 a.m.

Fitness

For those of you interested in fitness training there are many options around San Pedro including gyms, martial arts, indoors climbing, yoga and more.

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 Costa Rica. 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.

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-\$25. Haircuts for men will only cost a couple bucks. We recommend the places around the San Pedro church. For directions you may ask us 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
 December 25, Christmas Day.
 December 1st, Abolition of the army

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.

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. 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.). We always try to accommodate your special needs of allergies and dietary requirements, however, it is not always possible to meet your placement preferences in 100%. 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 ILISA Administration.

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.

Dryers

Dryers are not common in whole of Costa Rica. When you leave your clothes to be washed, please give them a few days to dry.

Bathroom culture

Please don't throw toilet paper or female hygiene products into the toilets as the pipes in Costa Rica are of a smaller than usual **diameter**. Clogging can be a problem.

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.

Travel time from your homestay to ILISA

It can vary between 10 and 45 minutes. We select our families depending on the quality service they provide, therefore, you can be sure that the families are our best choice even if they live further away. Moreover, we tend to choose the closest possible locations for our students, that usually only during a high season might be hard to imply in all cases. All selected by now host families are located not further than about 3 miles (5 km) away from Ilisa.

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

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.

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. There The rest is up to you!

Hours

ILISA is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you use our cafeteria or classrooms to study or rest in the afternoon, please wrap up before this time.

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 offers free wifi, you can request the passport at the front desk.

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: sunscreen (SPF 15+), 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: snorkel and mask, aspirin, flashlight, hiking boots, ziploc bags, gortex parka and pants, small first aid kit. If you like to eat a lot nuts, we recommend bringing some from home, since here in Costa Rica are expensive.

In any case, if you forget sandals, a towel, a rain poncho, an umbrella, etc. We recommend you stop by [Pequeño Mundo in San Pedro](#), it is a big store, very similar to dollar tree where you find everything you need for short trip and it is very inexpensive. But please do not expect high quality products.

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".

Laptop

You **don't need** a laptop for your Spanish classes although it can be useful.

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 fee.

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 cafeteria, can provide you with healthy, delicious snacks. 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 13% sales tax and 10% service charge in all bills. Gratuity for good service is completely optional. 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.

Ask at the front desk for restaurant recommendations around ILISA.

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, except uber, where you need to sit 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 U.S. about 1-2 weeks).

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 on the left to the Rosevelt park (behind the Outlet Mall-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

You can find Costa Rica maps in most bookstores or bazares (small shops that sell notebooks and school supplies) You can keep them as souvenir or use them to plan your trip around the country.

Medical Services

If you have an emergency, you can go to "emergencias" (urgent care) at the [Clínica Bíblica](#) or [Clínica Católica](#). 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 (~\$100). "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 at the front desk. It is hard to receive enough change to pay all the students exact amount of exchanged money, we ask you to come with at least \$20. The school charges a small commission to cover the bank's commission and our expenses.

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, euros, credit cards and wire transfers from US or European accounts.

Costa Rica has bank notes in 1000, 2000, 5000, 10000 and 20000 colones denominations. The most common coins denominations are: 5, 10, 25, 50, 100 and 500.

Bring only US dollars if you can because they are easier to change than 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.

Museo de los Niños

Hands-on exhibits for children and adults of a variety of themes including science, music and children in Costa Rica.

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.

Museos de Insectos

Claimed to be the only insect museum in Central America.

National Parks

For complete information on the national parks check the official website of [SINAC](#) where you can also buy the tickets online.

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 [Librería Internacional](#) and [Librería Universal](#)

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.

For safety's sake, we recommend that you take taxis/uber 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.

Passports

We strongly recommend you have a copy or picture of the page with your personal information 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 Hellen Rojas, Victoria Lip, Daniela Quesada. Hellen Rojas is our Director, Victoria is our weekend Receptionist.

The Spanish department:

Hellen 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 Hellen. Also, if you have any questions and/or comments regarding your classes or teachers, please don't hesitate to talk with Hellen anytime.

The teachers:

Our teachers here at ILISA are all well-trained, experienced and enthusiastic individuals.

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.
- Get some tips from the following video [Safety Tips While Traveling Abroad](#)
- 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

At ILISA we have an international phone that you can use for free to call to the US. As an alternative, if you have an unlocked phone, you can bring it along and easily buy a SIM card or chip here that gives you a local number and a prepaid amount to use.

It is important to remember that 1-800 numbers are not free dialing from Costa Rica and are charged the regular international rate.

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 3,500 to 6,000 colones (7.00 to 12 US\$). If you are interested in participating in the nightlife scene, it is also possible to do this cheaply – 30,000 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

80,000-150,000 colones per weekend trip can be sufficient. But remember that you don't need to carry a lot of cash with you, you can pay with cards in most places.

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:

- Read your text and/or listen to audios or videos 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 get some survival phrase book, preferably one with audios, and try to learn 20 or 30 useful phrases that you will need all the time. Most phrase online 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.

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 25% cancellation fee.

Religious Services

Baptist - The International Baptist Church of Costa Rica is located at Faro del Caribe, San Francisco de Dos Ríos (2286-1755).

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 5p.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 5:30p.m.

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

Rip Tides

Many of Costa Rica's beaches have rip tides, strong currents that can drag swimmers out to sea. A rip tide 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 rip tide, you can't escape the current by swimming towards the 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. Another great coffee brand we recommend is Doka, that you don't find in supermarket but you can order online or at ILISA's front desk. 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 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, you need to go outside to the sidewalk to smoke.

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.

Costa Rica is a huge soccer playing nation and it's cheap and easy to go see a good quality live professional game.

Telephone

See Phone and 'family telephone' under Host Families.

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 us 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 or uber

Costa Rica has an abundance of taxis and the cost is rather inexpensive (approximately \$1.6 per km or \$2.5 per mile. You can go to the nearest busy street and flag a taxi down. Moreover, it is highly recommended to always use a taxi or uber after 7 p.m. **We highly recommend uber instead of taxi.**

In recent years, Uber has become a viable transportation option on the streets of Costa Rica. It began operating in the country in 2015 and continues to grow with locals and tourists despite ambiguous legal concerns.

Taking Uber is a great alternative to taxis and public transport but with some stipulations. It's really only prevalent in cities like San Jose and isn't super helpful in other places

[Learn more about uber here](#)

Officially, taxi drivers are required to use their meters. If your driver doesn't turn the meter on, tell him "la maría por favor". Also, there is no tipping culture in Costa Rica, so no one expects from you to leave some extra colons or dollars.

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
Lléveme 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 María 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 300-700 Colones (around \$ 1.00 US). You don't need exact change on buses, but bills of 10000 and 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.

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, SANSa and Nature Air, offer flights to many domestic destinations for around \$50-150 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. We recommend you to book your car online.

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. Some 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. Remember to download Waze to navigate in Costa Rica.

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 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.

If you have overstayed your tourist visa, you will need to pay a fine of about \$100.

Always carry a copy or picture on your phone 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 in Spanish through an arrangement with [Saint Petersburg College in Florida](#). Credit is available at all levels, from beginning Spanish to upper-level courses.

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, others that are "vegetarian friendly" and others that aren't at all.

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 us, the next best thing we can recommend doing some research online about the most popular destinations in Costa Rica. This will help you generate ideas and give information on how to proceed. 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 during office hours (2280-0700). If on the weekend, please try our on-call cell phone at 6278-7058 (Hellen). In case nobody answers, call the host family. Normally these actions will not be necessary.

Please don't take a taxi or uber 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, text Hellen on WhatsApp or your driver (in spanish), we send you his/her contact information with your almost in Costa Rica email.

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!