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Table of Contents

Introduction to Costa Rica	3
Community and Host Organization	4
Who You Might Meet	5
Sample Itinerary	7
Projects and Expectations	7
Additional Packing Information	8
Accommodations	9
Electricity	9
Food	9
Weather	10
Money	10
Phone	10
Health	10
Arrival and Meet-Up	10
Entering and Leaving Costa Rica	12
Further Readings	12

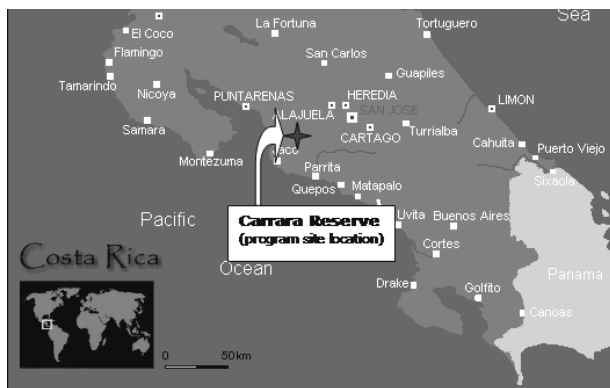


Introduction to Costa Rica

In spite of its small size, Costa Rica features greater biodiversity than Europe or North America. This is due to a number of factors, among them:

- The country's location between North and South America enables plants and animals from both continents and the Caribbean islands to establish themselves there.
- Costa Rica's tropical climate and geographical makeup includes a range of habitats, from lowland rainforest to cloud forests to tropical lakes and rivers.

Until relatively recently Costa Rica saw rapid deforestation, and during the 1970s land clearing was among the highest in the Americas. Rainforest destruction has serious environmental consequences because more than half of all the species on the planet are found in rain forest,.



The primary reasons for deforestation include the extraction of hardwood for fuel and clear-cutting land for agriculture and cattle ranching. In response to the rapid deforestation of the 1970s and 1980s many environmental groups began to target their efforts toward developing commercially viable and sustainable uses of the rain forest.

This strategy is to encourage local inhabitants to practice efficient stewardship over the remaining forests. In theory, this is a win-win situation where the environment prospers because it is no longer being clear-cut, and the local inhabitants prosper by using the local environment to their economic advantage.

However, the challenge lies in the implementation and operation of the program. The rain forests are indeed beginning to be used in more sustainable ways. Also, the costs of maintaining a rain forest are usually borne by the local inhabitants who have used the land for hundreds of years. Ecotourism in Costa Rica began in



the mid-1980s as a way to stop the deforestation and to generate needed foreign exchange for the economy.

Currently, ecotourism presents problems of its own and cannot be seen as a solution for all the problems of the past. Costa Rica has struggled with efforts to establish rules and regulations to ensure a minimal negative impact on the environment.

Program Community

The town of El Sur de Turrubares and ECOSUR

Until the year of 1990 El Sur de Turrubares was a prosperous farming community. Between 1991 and 1994 many families emigrated from El Sur because a large portion of their farmland was declared a protected wildlife reserve. This land is a biological corridor for wildlife moving between habitats in protected areas. Even those families that initially kept their small farms within the National Park soon had to move because the animals, now protected by the government, were destroying their crops as they passed through the land. In spite of the changes that had occurred, a small population stayed in El Sur de Turrubares.

In the following years, various outside visitors helped the townspeople to understand that the great diversity of flora and fauna in the area and the unique and hospitable culture maintained by the families would make ecotourism a viable option to bring income to the area and preserve the town.



In the middle of 1996, the members of the town met to start developing these new ideas, and created the Association of Small-Scale Producers of El Sur de Turrubares, known as EcoSur. This is the organization that Globe Aware works with today.

The townspeople received various courses in tourist organization and started a close relationship with the Administration of National Parks, "MINAE," who taught them about natural resource conservation. They learned that conserving their natural resources would not only ensure the environmental future of the area, but also the economic future of the town by attracting foreign capital through ecotourism.

In order for the community of El Sur de Turrubares to achieve their own eco-tourism independence, they need help establishing certain facilities: interpretive centers (a Nature Education center), marked trails, prevention of trail erosion, English speaking guides, improved communications infrastructure, computer instruction, a greenhouse, improvements to communal buildings, and maintenance to the only (unpaved) road into the community, etc. This process is expected to take several years. The ultimate goal is for the community of El Sur to be independent, without the need for help from outside organizations. The community has had some past experience receiving various handouts without accountability. Globe Aware wants to ensure that our efforts result in independence, rather than dependence on us. EcoSur's goals, established together with Globe Aware, have the following guiding principles:

- To conserve and revive the natural environment.
- To encourage the consistent realization and sustainability of traditional Costa Rican agriculture & culture.
- To be an education center of Costa Rican flora, fauna, and bird life.
- To maintain a clean environment.
- To encourage upright occupations in order to minimize social problems.
- To care for the disadvantaged and for children and to arm them with sustainable skills.

El Sur Today:

El Sur currently consists of about 60 people and a handful of houses. It is very small and remote, but amazingly friendly and beautiful! Numerous rivers and streams cross through the town. The town center consists of a church, an elementary school (for the tiny number of elementary-aged children), the salon, which is the town meeting center, and a store/bar called the pulperia. There is also a soccer field (plaza).

Who You Might Meet

The 5 Families of EcoSur: These are the families who will be hosting you for meals.



Alvaro and Nena

Alvaro is the town patriarch. He owns the local store (pulperia) and lots of land for his cows and horses. His wife is named Maria Elena (also known as Nena). He has 3 sons: Henry, (right), Roy (not pictured, works for the Carara National Park), and Michael (far right, holding his son). Peluquin is Alvaro's dog that follows him everywhere.



Mario and Lourdes

Mario works with us on every project, and can fix anything with a machete. His wife, Lourdes, is also extremely helpful. They have two daughters, Alejandra (right), and Daniela (left)

Aracely and Carmen

The town grandparents, Aracely and Carmen have lived in El Sur for decades and love hosting Globe Aware volunteers. Carmen still works in his fields every day, and loves to demonstrate his trapiche, where sugar cane is processed into sugar. Volunteers may visit the trapiche as a cultural activity during the week.



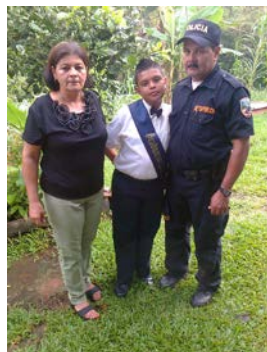
Ronald and Karol



Ronald is a master woodworker and volunteers love visiting his workshop. He makes a variety of beautiful woodcrafts that volunteers may purchase. Karol and Ronald also keep bees, and will let you sample their delicious rainforest honey. If you ask nicely, Ronald may also serenade you with traditional Costa Rican ballads after dinner with his family. They have 2 young daughters named Raquel and Mariana. They also have 2 parakeets and a very friendly dog named Rocky.

Gilda and Rafael

Though Gilda and Rafael (better known as Chino) live the farthest from the cabinas, their warm hospitality is worth the walk. Gilda is our main community liason and loves having volunteers to her home, and keeps a journal that she asks volunteers to sign. Chino is a police officer and can often be seen zooming to work on his motorcycle. Gilda makes lovely crocheted pieces. They have 3 children: a grown son, a grown daughter, Cristina (not pictured), and a young son, Andrey.



Sample Itinerary:

Please note that the sample itinerary provided in the orientation materials is given as a guide and is subject to change! Most cultures are not as preoccupied with schedules and time as we are. It is best to not be overly concerned with scheduling. Groups may also elect to visit the Manuel Antonio beach one afternoon or an optional ziplining (canopy) excursion, though volunteers bear the cost for transport there.

Projects and Expectations

You will be working on a variety of community development projects during your volunteer week in El Sur. Past projects include implementing a recycling program and building receptacles, building a greenhouse and tree nursery, painting the various community buildings, and refurbishing the local water infrastructure. The community chooses your work projects before your arrival based on the progress of prior groups and the immediate needs of the community.

Please remember that concepts of scheduling and organization are not universal. It is best to keep an open mind and not be judgmental when visiting a foreign country. Remember that your way of doing things may not be the best way here – the locals usually also have a very good reason for completing a task in a certain way, and their priorities may be different than ours. Here is an example:

“But Mario, why are we building the fence so close to the river? Surely erosion will cause the fence to fall off the edge!”

“Don’t worry, the foundation is very thick – it won’t fall. Besides, we can’t move it any more because the boundaries of the soccer field are too close!”

Ah ha!

We understand your desire to know as much as possible about the project you will be working on. It is important to understand that projects are often not established until about two weeks prior, as they are based on factors such as which projects were finished by the last group, what supplies are available, how many volunteers are in your group, weather conditions, the changing priorities of the community, etc, and can even be modified throughout the week. It is best to approach the experience with an open attitude, knowing you'll be working approximately 6.5 hours a day during the week days, usually concentrated earlier in the day. You will also have a couple of hours of unstructured free time every day. There are typically three to four planned but optional leisure and cultural activities throughout the week. Communicate with your coordinator. If you find the work level is too much, or not enough, he or she will do as much as possible to work with you.

Additional Packing Information

Please refer to the general orientation handbook for a general suggested packing list.

Our program location is very humid and often muddy. Pack light, **very casual** and quick drying clothes. Your work clothes may be ruined with paint or mud. You may want hiking boots or comfortable and sturdy work shoes. Expect narrow, muddy, and uneven trails and bring appropriate footwear. You should also bring rubber rain boots for the mud. We recommend bringing work gloves that may get dirty, a few snacks and Ziploc bags. Strong insect repellent is essential. Make sure to pack enough clothes to be comfortable, considering sweat, mud, paint, etc. You may hand wash clothes in a laundry sink behind the cabins, but this should not be necessary on a weeklong trip. You may enjoy bringing games or books for free time.

Essential Items:

- Bug Repellent with at least 20% deet
- Rubber rain boots (may be available on site, but sizes and availability cannot be guaranteed) These can make a big difference in your comfort at the program site.
- Sunscreen
- Flashlight (walking from homes to the cabins at night is dark)
- Water bottle
- Umbrella

Please note that the packing list is meant as a guideline. There is no single item that you can't live without for one week. Pack what you think you will need to be comfortable, but do not get preoccupied about items that you didn't bring, weren't on the list, etc. **Everyone has different opinions about essential items.**

Recent volunteers have noted that mosquito nets can make the stay at El Sur more comfortable. While they are not an essential item, you could consider bringing one if you think you will benefit from it.

Also consider “Shower in a bag” if you think that hot water will be an issue. Hot water is not available and if you think it may make you more comfortable, it is a device that you fill up with water, hang from a tree and water is heated by the sun during the day – hot water at your fingertips in the afternoon.

Accommodations

Volunteers built these great “cabinas” just a few years ago. Each cabina sleeps 6 upstairs and 2 downstairs, though beds may be rearranged depending on circumstances. There is a bathroom with shower, sink, and toilet in each. An additional toilet and shower are located behind one of the cabinas. EcoSur is planning a large expansion of one of the cabinas in the near future. There is no hot water, but most people find it tolerable in the tropical climate. Warm water will be provided in the near future. Mosquito nets are available, but not usually necessary, and there are also fans to help keep you cool. A third building between the cabinas often serves as the kitchen, where volunteers will make and eat breakfast.



When In Rome...

The plumbing in Costa Rica is different than in the US. If flushed, toilet paper almost always clogs the system and the toilets back up and flood. In Costa Rica there are always trash cans next to the toilet for easy disposal of your toilet paper. (Don't take our word for it, Google it or look in a guidebook.) Respect the plumbing and throw away your used toilet paper rather than flushing it. Yes the toilets seem to handle occasional small bits. And yes, if you go to the Costa Rica Four Seasons, their plumbing is the same as in North America. This is the single hardest fact for most North Americans to tolerate, but give it a try out of respect for the infrastructure. While its tempting to assume there will be a stench, you'll find that for some reason, there usually isn't.

- (Note that in the event of an earthquake, nothing is heartier than a Costa Rican home. They are built almost exclusively with metal and concrete, not wood and sheet rock, and their foundations go deeper than you could ever imagine into the ground.)

- Did you know that Costa Ricans think it is dirty and disgusting to wash your underwear with your other clothes? Also you will NEVER see them washing shoes and the like in the sink. The outdoor “Pila” is used for that purpose. They feel shoes get nothing but dirt and elimination on them, and consequently should not be washed in the same area where food is prepared.

Electricity

There is limited electricity: enough to recharge digital batteries, but not enough to do heavy-duty hair drying. Voltage is the same as North America, 110V.. Electrical outlets take the same type plug as in North America, so a prong adaptor is not necessary.

Food

Lunch and dinner will be taken with local families, with the exception of a Welcome and Good-bye dinner, which will be eaten with the community in the salon. Volunteers will be split into small groups for meals. Each group will eat with all five families during the week. Food is delicious and will include a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, juice, beans, rice, beef, chicken, etc. Vegetarians can easily be accommodated. Volunteers will prepare their own breakfast of cereal, yogurt, coffee, fruit, and juice in their common kitchen area.

Weather

Costa Rica is warm and humid year-round. There are 2 seasons, wet and dry. The dry season is more accurately described as the less-rainy season. During the rainy season, you are likely to get one shower a day that will last for 1 or 2 hours and then it clears up. As a measure for how locals view their micro-climate, on a rainy day, you might here them refer to the day as being a winter day, and the next day if it is dry, they will call it a summer day. The temperatures tend to range from 70s at night, and up to the high 80s in the day all year round. It is a good idea to carry your umbrella with you as the rain starts suddenly in the rainforest.

Money

There is no ATM or bank in El Sur de Turrubares. Make sure that you have adequate colones before you depart San Jose. (Many simply withdraw colones from the ATM at the airport). You should not need much extra money while at the program site, just enough for incidentals such as phone cards, alcohol, or snacks from the local store. You may also want money to purchase local craft souvenirs in El Sur. Please also keep in mind that it is much easier to use small bills, as it is often difficult to get change for a small purchase paid with a larger

note. If your group elects to make a beach visit, participants will generally need an additional \$50 or so to cover the cost of private transportation. ****Also, a note for all program locations—it is a good idea that you call your bank and credit card companies before you depart and notify them of the country you will be traveling to and the dates of your travel so that they will allow charges and/or withdrawals internationally.****

Phone

Please do not plan on spending a lot of time on the phone at the program site. We will have a busy and short week to be immersed in the culture. Should you anticipate needing to make calls from El Sur, please remember to purchase a calling card in San Jose before arriving on site. The local store may sell calling cards, but availability is unpredictable. The best kind is a 199 calling card. \$1000 colones gets you about 6 minutes to the United States. You must use a calling card to make both national and international calls! Do not bother bringing calling cards from home, as they usually do not work from Costa Rica.

There is a very old computer with unreliable dial-up access at the program site. At the first hint of rain, the phones often go out. Computers tend to go bad fast in the tropical climate. Hence you are not at all likely to be able to access the internet while on the program.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Health

You should not need any special vaccinations or medications to come to Costa Rica. For additional information on travel health in Costa Rica, please refer to the CDC's website <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationCostaRica.aspx>. Please be aware that Dengue Fever, a mosquito-borne illness is present throughout tropical Central America. It is essential to use mosquito repellent with at least 20% deet at all times.

Arrival and Meet-Up

U.S. and Canadian citizens may visit Costa Rica for up to 90 days. You must have a valid passport, which will need to be valid for at least 90 days after your trip to Costa Rica and at least 2 blank pages.

If you are traveling with a minor without BOTH parents traveling as well, it is a good idea to get a notarized letter from the non-traveling parent authorizing travel to and from Costa Rica, the dates of travel, and so on. While this seems to be not 100% enforced, it is enforced enough by either the U.S. Airlines or by Costa Rica immigration that if you do NOT have it, you may find your travel plans stopped in their tracks. You may not be able to leave the USA or you may be refused entry to Costa Rica.

Once you land, you must proceed to immigration. There you will present your documentation (passport). Depending on the number of planes landing at the same time, this can take 10-20 minutes to over an hour. Mid-day arrivals will usually wait longer.

You will next go to baggage claim where you will pick up your luggage. If your luggage is missing you will need to let the airline know and provide the address where you will be staying, or wait for the next flight as it is likely it will come in that flight. You should let us know **immediately** if there are any delays that might affect meet up.

If delayed baggage needs to be delivered to the program site, use this address and phone number:

El Sur de Turrubares, cerca del Parque Nacional Carara

Phone number: +506 8 020 2082 / +506 8 669 9608 / +506 2 416 0439 Gilda Sanchez Salazar

Once you have picked up your luggage (or reported if delayed), walk to customs. The red/stop, green/go system will tell you if you are going to be inspected or questioned. Do NOT bring any drugs, firearms or illegal substances into Costa Rica. If you go to jail in Costa Rica, your rights are minimal. The Costa Rica legal system is much different than the US. You can and will go to jail, you will very likely not be able to post bond, You can be held for many months with only a formal complaint while the prosecutor investigates and builds the case against you. You are not innocent until proven guilty under Costa Rica Law.

After customs, you will proceed down another corridor where you will exit the airport.

There is a bus stop outside the airport for the Alajuela – San Jose and Alajuela – Heredia route in both directions. Buses from other routes also stop there. If you are not fluent in Spanish, we recommend to not attempt to figure out the bus system. It is better to arrange a private transfer service or regular licensed taxi.

Licensed taxis are available at the airport and will generally accept both colones and U.S. dollars, but not other currencies. Licensed taxis are red with yellow triangles on the doors, additionally there is an airport taxi service that is licensed and employs orange taxis. All licensed taxis should have working door handles, seatbelts and meters (called “marias”). Passengers are encouraged to use seatbelts. You can also hire your own private transportation directly at the airport exit. A private van is usually the same as a regular taxi.

Unless specifically arranged otherwise, you are responsible for making your own arrangements from the airport to the meet up point. The Hotel Mi Tierra is a 5 minute ride from the airport and will cost about \$5.00 USD to get there.

If you are arriving the day before the program starts, this is a great place to stay, however please note that you do not have to stay here. Many volunteers choose to stay here if they arrive in Costa Rica prior to the Saturday their program starts, but you are by no means obligated to do so. Rates range from \$35-\$45 dollars per person, before tax. Please see www.hotelmitierra.net for more information or to make reservations.

Again, this is merely a suggestion on where you might stay in San Jose prior to the program. We suggest that you purchase a guidebook such as Lonely Planet for more options on accommodations and everything else you might want to know upon arrival in Costa Rica.

We have chosen this as our meet-up point because of its central location, safe neighborhood, and pleasant environment. If you are not staying in the hotel, a taxi from the airport should be around \$15-20.

Volunteers will be picked up in Alejuela downtown at the Mi Tierra Hotel at 12:30 p.m. on the Saturday that the program starts.

Entering and Leaving Costa Rica

You will receive a 90-day tourist visa stamp when you enter the country.

You will need to pay the departure tax at the airport when you leave Costa Rica. It is currently \$29, though this is subject to change. You may pay it in dollars, colones, or by credit card.

You pay the departure tax at the airport when you leave. In the San Jose airport, there is an area just to the right as you enter the departures area. There are a large number of desks where the tax is collected. This is a great way to get rid of those spare Costa Rican colones as you leave.

Once you have paid your departure tax, you must proceed to your airline. Lines are frequently long. Your bags will be examined and inspected for items not permitted on the flight. Carry on bags will go through the usual scanner process, but you may be examined again and all your carry on baggage might be opened and inspected.

United States Embassy

San Jose, Costa Rica

Calle 120 Avenida 0, Pavas

Main line: (506) 519 2000

Emergency After Hours:

(506) 519 2280, (506) 519 2279, (506) 220 3127

Safety and Security

Costa Rica is a very safe country and incidents of violent crime are very rare. Please be vigilant at all times when in San Jose as pickpockets are common, especially in crowded areas. Secure your personal belongings and do not carry your passport or credit cards in easily accessible places.


State Department Travel Information

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1093.html

Further Readings

- Lonely Planet Costa Rica – a comprehensive guidebook
- Costa Rica - A Traveler's Literary Companion, edited by Barabara Ras, is an excellent compendium of 26 short stories by 20th-century Costa Rican writers.
- The Costa Ricans by Richard Biesanz et al provides a historical perspective on Costa Rica's political and social change.
- La Loca de Gandoca by Anacristina Rossi is a conservation-related novel by a prize-winning tica novelist.

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