



Welcome!

Your upcoming study abroad experience may well change your life. It will certainly change your perceptions and lead you to new thoughts and directions.

Most of us at AIFS have studied abroad. We are here to help you plan for your overseas study and to make your transition abroad as easy as possible. Please call us if you have any questions concerning your program.

As you prepare to leave the U.S., take some time to consider your plans and expectations. It is interesting and fun to compare them before your departure and after your return. Many come true. Others are tempered by the reality of your experience abroad. Flexibility in attitudes and expectations will enhance your ability to enjoy a new culture and to experience another country's lifestyle. Try to be open-minded and don't compare everything to what you are accustomed at home. Sure, life may seem less luxurious and comfortable, but there are many other things to compensate for this.

What you get from your time abroad will depend on how much effort you put into breaking away from your American group and meeting new people in the communities you're visiting. AIFS will do everything it can to provide you with advice, information, resources and suggestions on how to do this. The AIFS social and cultural program will enable you to enjoy many events at reduced rates. Make the most of these opportunities to learn about Costa Rica and all it offers.

You are sure to have many questions and concerns before the start of your program. You will be able to answer many of your own questions if you take the time to review this handbook and do a little extra research before your departure. This will enable you to leave feeling more confident and prepared.

The most important thing to take with you is a positive attitude! It will help you adjust and enjoy life overseas more fully.

Please do not hesitate to contact AIFS for assistance, advice or guidance. The Stamford, CT, office can be reached at (800) 727-2437, and our overseas Student Services staff can be contacted by e-mail at studentinfo@aifs.co.uk. **Clearly mark your e-mail "Costa Rica program."**

Enjoy your adventure!

The Partnership Programs Staff

Table of Contents

THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GO ABROAD	1
PASSPORTS.....	1
Passport Agencies	2
VISAS & ENTERING OTHER COUNTRIES	4
Entering Costa Rica	4
IMMUNIZATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS	4
MONEY.....	5
ATM Cards.....	5
Credit Cards.....	5
Traveler's Checks.....	6
Receiving Money from the U.S.....	6
Western Union Money in Minutes Transfer Service.....	6
Handling Foreign Currency.....	7
BUDGETING AND SPENDING MONEY.....	7
BAGGAGE TIPS.....	8
Baggage Regulations.....	9
WHAT TO PACK	10
Clothing	10
Practical Items	11
TOURIST OFFICE	13
YOUTH HOSTEL CARDS	13
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)	15
PERSONAL SAFETY ABROAD	15
DRUG ARREST	16
LEGAL AID.....	17
CULTURE SHOCK	17
ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS	19
IN COSTA RICA	21
ARRIVAL & ORIENTATION	21
THE STUDY CENTER	21
AIFS PROGRAM COORDINATOR	21
HOUSING AND MEALS	21
Accommodations.....	22
TIME.....	25
COMMUNICATION.....	25
ACADEMIC LIFE.....	26
COMPUTERS	26
Internet/E-mail Access	26
TRAVEL	26
Travel out of Santa Barbara.....	26
HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE.....	27
Counseling.....	27
CLIMATE	27
ELECTRICITY	27
CULTURAL ACTIVITIES	28
SPORTS	28
Q & A	28

THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GO ABROAD

PASSPORTS

Students planning to study abroad need a valid passport for the duration of their stay overseas. If you have a passport that is scheduled to expire during your program or within six months from the start of your program, **renew it now**.

Demand for passports becomes heavy each year in March and does not begin to decline until August. Even from September through February, periodic fluctuations occur. Apply for your passport now. You will not be able to embark on your flight without a valid passport in hand.

If you are applying for your first passport, you must present in person a completed Form DSP-11, "Passport Application," at one of the passport agencies listed on the next page. Several thousand Federal and State courts and U.S. post offices also accept passport applications. Check with those closest to your home. If they do not accept the applications, they will be able to recommend a place in your area that does. Otherwise, you should call or write to the passport agency nearest your home address. (See "Passport Agencies" on the next page for the agency nearest you.)

To obtain a passport you will need:

- I. A properly completed Passport Application (Form DSP-11)
- II. Proof of Citizenship, including:
 - A. A previously issued passport or one in which you were included (e.g., family passport). If you are applying for your first passport or cannot submit a previous passport, you must submit other evidence of citizenship.
 - B. If you were born within the United States: A birth certificate that must show that the birth record was filed shortly after your birth and which must be certified with the registrar's signature and raised, embossed or multicolored seal. ("Notifications of Birth Registration" and "Birth Announcements" are not normally accepted for passport purposes.)
 - C. If you were born abroad:
 - i. A Certificate of Naturalization
 - ii. A Certificate of Citizenship
 - iii. A Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. (Form FS-240) or a Certification of Birth (Form FS-545 or DS-1350.)
- III. Two recent identical photographs. They must be signed on the reverse side and the signature must agree with the one on the application. The photos must be 2" x 2" and are acceptable in black and white or color.

When you receive your passport, be sure to sign it and fill in the personal notification data. If your passport is lost or stolen within the United States, report the loss or theft immediately to Passport Services, Department of State, Washington D.C. 20520, or to the nearest passport agency. The loss or theft should also be reported to the local police authorities.

IF YOUR PASSPORT IS LOST OR STOLEN WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD, CONTACT THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE CLOSEST AMERICAN CONSULATE IMMEDIATELY.

Passport Agencies

The automated appointment number for all passport agencies is (877) 487-2778.

BOSTON PASSPORT AGENCY

Thomas P. O'Neill Federal Building
10 Causeway Street, Suite 247
Boston, MA 02222-1094

CHICAGO PASSPORT AGENCY

Kluczynski Federal Building
230 South Dearborn Street, 18th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-1564

COLORADO PASSPORT AGENCY

Cherry Creek III
3151 South Vaughn Way, Suite 600
Aurora, CO 80014

CONNECTICUT PASSPORT AGENCY

50 Washington Street
Norwalk, CT 06854

HONOLULU PASSPORT AGENCY

Prince Kuhio Federal Building
300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Suite 1-330
Honolulu, HI 96850

HOUSTON PASSPORT AGENCY

Mickey Leland Federal Building
1919 Smith Street, Suite 1400
Houston, TX 77002-8049

LOS ANGELES PASSPORT AGENCY

Federal Building
11000 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90024-3615

MIAMI PASSPORT AGENCY

Claude Pepper Federal Office Building
51 SW First Avenue, 3rd Floor
Miami, FL 33130-1680

NEW ORLEANS PASSPORT AGENCY

One Canal Place
(corner of Canal and North Peters Streets)
365 Canal Street, Suite 1300
New Orleans, LA 70130-6508

NEW YORK PASSPORT AGENCY

376 Hudson Street
(between W. Houston & King Streets)
New York, NY 10014

PHILADELPHIA PASSPORT AGENCY

U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street, Room 103
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2970

SAN FRANCISCO PASSPORT AGENCY

95 Hawthorne Street
Fifth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

SEATTLE PASSPORT AGENCY

Henry Jackson Federal Building
915 Second Avenue
Suite 992
Seattle, WA 98174-1091

WASHINGTON PASSPORT AGENCY

1111 19th Street, N.W.
First Floor, Sidewalk Level
Washington, DC 20036

For general passport information, you may dial the Federal Information Center at (800) 688-9889, or visit their website at www.state.gov.

VISAS & ENTERING OTHER COUNTRIES

A visa is an endorsement stamped into your passport by a foreign government allowing you to enter that particular country for a specific purpose and period of time. Visas are valid from the date on which they are issued.

Every country has its own immigration policies for students. Please make sure you have fulfilled all the necessary requirements before your departure. When entering other countries, prepare to be asked to explain why you are there, where you are staying and how long you will stay. As a study abroad participant you have a legitimate reason for entering the country, as long as you have obtained the appropriate visa documents.

Entering Costa Rica

U.S. Citizens

A visa will not be required for U.S. citizens spending less than 90 days in Costa Rica. You must, however, possess a valid passport and a pre-paid airline ticket to exit Costa Rica. There is a \$26 Departure Tax payable at the airport before check-in for all passengers departing Costa Rica.

Non-U.S. citizens

If you are not a U.S. citizen, it is your responsibility to obtain all necessary documentation:

1. Check to see if your passport is still valid. If it is not, renew it immediately.
2. Contact the embassy in Washington or nearest Consulate of the countries that you plan to visit or travel through (e.g., if you have a connecting flight in Mexico City) to learn if visas are necessary. **Please note that you may require a visa if you are only changing planes in a certain country, even if you will not be exiting the airport.**
3. Apply for all necessary visas at once.
4. If you are a permanent resident of the U.S., take your Resident Alien card abroad with you. You will be asked to show it to the U.S. Immigration Officials upon your return to the U.S.

If you plan to travel to other countries during breaks or at the end of your study abroad program, it is your responsibility to find out what documentation is necessary for those countries. You are able to stay in Costa Rica for up to 90 days without a visa if you are a U.S. citizen. If you wish to extend your stay past 90 days you should file for a stay extension at the Immigration Department of Costa Rica, or you may exit Costa Rica and re-enter. A fine will be charged upon departure from Costa Rica if you overstay your permitted length in the country.

IMMUNIZATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

Check with your physician or student health service regarding immunization requirements for the countries you plan to visit. Make sure that childhood immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella [MMR]; diphtheria-tetanus, etc.) are up-to-date.

Students, particularly those living away from home for the first time, have shown a marked vulnerability to meningitis Group C. As a result, students are strongly encouraged to receive an immunization against both Groups A and C prior to departure from the U.S. Check with your physician for specific details.

Be sure to schedule an appointment for a complete physical examination with your physician prior to departure.

Use common sense when it comes to your health while you are abroad. The stress of travel and time change combined with a new daily routine can be unsettling at first. Be sure to eat well, drink plenty of fluids and get enough sleep. This will help you get through the adjustment phase at the start of your term abroad.

Always travel with any medications you use on a regular basis, as well as copies of your prescriptions. It is especially important to have a prescription on hand if you will be carrying insulin, syringes or narcotics. Make sure that all medications are carried in their original containers and that your name appears clearly on each label. Be sure you have the generic name of any prescription medication as brand names can vary between countries. Do not assume that prescriptions can be filled as easily overseas as they can be in the U.S. If possible, bring enough medication to last the entire trip. Those with chronic medical conditions should have their physician fully document their case listing any necessary medications. Carry this documentation with you and be sure to inform the AIFS staff in case there is a problem.

If you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, be sure to take an extra pair of glasses and a copy of your prescription with you. It is also helpful to leave an extra prescription with someone at home so that they can send you a replacement pair in an emergency. Contact lens wearers will want to bring their care products (solutions, tablets, eye drops, etc.) with them abroad as the cost of these products is very high overseas.

MONEY

The currency in Costa Rica is the *colón*. You will also find that the U.S. dollar is widely accepted. Although you can pay with U.S. currency, your change will be in colones. You are advised only to use U.S. dollars for larger purchases. Colones should always be used on buses, in local taxis, and in small shops.

ATM cards, traveler's checks and credit cards are the safest and simplest ways to carry and obtain money, as you will not be able to open a bank account in Costa Rica. Following is information on various currency options.

ATM Cards

Perhaps the most efficient means of accessing your money is via cash dispenser networks (*cajero automático*). The *Plus* and *Cirrus* networks can be accessed from several cash machines in Santa Barbara, allowing cash to be withdrawn from a U.S. bank account if your card is linked to one of these systems. Students should check with their local banks for ATM capabilities and related costs in Costa Rica. Make sure you get a four-digit PIN code from your bank before leaving the U.S. Please note that most Latin American ATMs do not have letters on their keypads. Be sure to memorize your PIN by its numbers before you depart the U.S., and be sure it consists of four digits. Most banks can provide a booklet listing worldwide locations where your card will work.

Be aware that ATMs occasionally fail to work without warning. Be sure to have some U.S. dollars or credit cards on hand as back-ups. Do not rely solely on ATMs while abroad.

Credit Cards

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. VISA is the most widely accepted credit card in Costa Rica. Remember that although credit cards are accepted in most parts of the world, they are not accepted everywhere. Before entering any establishment where you plan to charge your purchase, be sure that credit cards are accepted.

Some banks will allow you to withdraw colones on your credit card. Make sure you know your four-digit PIN number before leaving home. An American Express card will allow you to cash your personal checks at the American Express office. American Express offices are also able to access extra funds from your bank account at home.

Purchases on your credit card are converted into your home currency. If you make two purchases with your credit card in one day, you may be charged two different exchange rates. If you want to be certain of the rate of exchange, insist that the establishment enters the current rate of exchange on your credit card charge. This precaution will prevent the management from holding your charge until a more favorable rate (to them) comes along. Be sure to record credit card numbers in case of loss or theft.

Traveler's Checks

If you bring traveler's checks it is best to bring smaller denominations of \$10's \$20's and \$50's. Some areas may have difficulty in making change for larger bills. Banks and hotels will exchange your traveler's checks and will charge a commission. Be sure to keep your travelers check receipts separate from the traveler's checks. If your traveler's checks are lost or stolen, you can use your receipts to get replacement checks.

Be aware of restrictions, transaction fees and service charges on the above.

Receiving Money from the U.S.

Wire transfers should only be used as a last resort; they vary in effectiveness and you often need to have a bank account in your host country in order to receive the wire.

Personal checks drawn on U.S. bank accounts are not accepted in Costa Rica unless you have a bank account available in that country into which you can deposit the check. Even then it may still take at least six to eight weeks for the check to clear, often longer. The Costa Rican bank will send the personal check back to the U.S. for collection, and you will have to wait for clearance to receive the funds from which service fees will be deducted. It is a lengthy, inconvenient and expensive way to receive money while abroad.

Western Union Money in Minutes Transfer Service

Money sent from the U.S. can be available for pick-up from another Western Union agent in Costa Rica within minutes.

Money can be sent online, by telephone or by visiting a Western Union agent. For details on how to send money, visit www.westernunion.com.

The money sender should notify the recipient who can then accordingly pick up the transfer at the designated Western Union office.

There are several Western Union agents in the province of Heredia, including:

Servimas Paseo de las Flores
Centro Comercial Paseo de las Flores
In front of the Interamerica University
Heredia
Costa Rica 1000
(506) 2210-8381

Handling Foreign Currency

- Go to major local banks or to national banks in cities to exchange currency rather than to small banks or money brokers.
- Use banks and the exchange offices at the airport.
- Exchange traveler's checks instead of cash. You will get a better exchange rate for traveler's checks.
- Buy a small amount of foreign currency (\$100) before departure to have handy upon arrival for taxis, buses and tips. This is especially important if you will not be traveling on the AIFS group flight as you will be making your own way to Santa Barbara. Buy more if you arrive on a weekend.
- Do not keep a lot of local currency when you depart a country. Exchange it at a bank or at a departure terminal. It may not be easy to exchange foreign currency when you return home as only bills may be exchanged, not coins.
- Never exchange your money in hotels, restaurants, bars or shops. They can and will charge high commissions and are not obligated to charge the daily exchange rate.
- Never carry large sums of cash with you. If it is lost or stolen there is no way to replace it, and it is not covered by insurance.

BUDGETING AND SPENDING MONEY

Temptations for spending money in Costa Rica are great and you should keep this in mind, particularly at the beginning of the program. After a while, you will become accustomed to life in Costa Rica and will more easily regulate your expenses. You will need to plan carefully. The AIFS social calendar will provide a range of activities for your enjoyment.

AIFS recommends students budget \$170-210 per week for the basic extras and day-to-day needs. This will not cover extensive personal travel and expensive gift buying. It is advisable to have a credit card in case of unexpected costs.

When budgeting, don't forget to include weekend trips, any additional cultural and social activities you might want to pursue that are not offered as part of your program, and additional excursions offered at a non-subsidized rate. Add another \$100-200 for each trip you plan to take. Budget at least \$500 for any holiday breaks.

Plan your budget carefully and stick to it. As a rule, it's better to bring too much money and not spend it all than not to have enough and miss opportunities.

How can I calculate the total cost for the program?

The program can be divided into four cost areas: AIFS program fee, flight cost, home institution's tuition fee and spending money.

Many items and services cost much more in Costa Rica than in the U.S. Here are some basic prices, based on local, non-brand-named items:



Personal Items

Soap (3-pack)	\$.50 - \$1.00
Toothpaste	\$2.00
Toothbrush	\$1.00 - \$1.50
Shampoo	\$1.00
Deodorant	\$2.00 - \$3.00
Hand cream	\$2.00 - \$3.00
Hair spray	\$3.00 - \$4.00
Tampons (box of 10)	\$2.00 - \$4.00
4 AA batteries	\$4.00 - \$5.00

Meals

3 course meal/beverage in an inexpensive restaurant	\$8.00
3 course meal/beverage in a mid-priced restaurant	\$12.00
Pizza for one, dessert and beverage in a pizzeria	\$10.00

For a budget meal, expect to pay between \$3.00 - \$7.00

For a mid-range meal, expect to pay between \$10.00 - \$15.00

For an expensive meal, expect to pay around \$25.00

BAGGAGE TIPS

It is important to use luggage that is durable, easy to pack and easy to carry. Check the handles and seams to make sure that they are secure. Soft luggage with zippered openings is lighter and easier to pack than a hard case. You will find backpacks useful to bring for weekend trips. They are easy to carry and many convert into suitcases.

Check your airline's website close to departure as information is constantly changing.

Here are some additional tips:

Pack only what you can carry. Porters are scarce abroad and luggage carts are prohibited in some parts of the airport, so do not rely on them for assistance. Do not rely on family or friends either — they will not be with you when you arrive at your overseas destination. You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage throughout your journey, until you return home, even if you are on the AIFS flight.

Pack categorically. Put clothes, toiletries, maps and guidebooks into separate compartments so that you can find them easily. Take along copies of all medical prescriptions, including eyeglasses and/or contact lenses, in case you need a refill.

Be careful what you pack in your carry-on. Any liquids packed in your carry-on must measure 3 oz. or less per container, and all such containers must fit in a quart-sized zip-top clear plastic bag that you will remove when going through security. This bag will be screened separately, apart from your luggage, so be sure it is easily accessible. For the most updated information on packing, as well as airport security, check <http://www.tsa.gov>.

Identify your luggage. Each piece of luggage, including your carry-on, should be identified with a tag showing your name and address at home and abroad. Also, put a slip of paper with your name and home address inside your luggage in case your outer tags come off during handling. Always

remove old, incorrect address and airline tags to avoid confusion. As an extra precaution, you may want to put a ribbon or a piece of brightly colored tape on your luggage to help you identify it easily in the baggage claim area. If you will be taking the AIFS flight, be sure to use the baggage tags we send you. These make you easier to identify both to the other students on the program and to the AIFS Student Advisors meeting you overseas.

Never leave your bags unattended at the airport. Keep an eye on your bags at all times. Airlines will not accept luggage that was not packed by its owner, or that was left unguarded.

Pack a few essentials in your carry-on. Unfortunately, some students have had to start their study abroad program without their luggage. Just in case the airline should lose your luggage, pack your toothbrush, any medications you need to take, an extra set of underwear, etc., in your carry-on.

Also, if your baggage does go astray en route to your overseas campus, file a claim with the airline upon arrival before you leave the secure area at the airport. Inform the local AIFS Program Coordinator about the claim; s/he may be able to assist you. Most airlines require that you make your lost luggage claim within four hours after arrival.

Be sure that your luggage and its contents are insured against theft or loss. Personal effects insurance coverage is not included in the AIFS program fee. If you purchased the AIFS Personal Effects Insurance Coverage, you have personal effects insurance, but there are exclusions and per-item limits, so check your insurance brochure carefully. Leave expensive and valuable items at home. If you must bring such items with you, make sure they will be covered, either by the AIFS insurance or by your own. If you must file a claim during the program, complete the *AIFS Personal Effects Claim Form* and give it to your AIFS Student Advisor.

Only students who purchased the AIFS Personal Effects Insurance Coverage have personal effects insurance coverage and may use the Personal Effects Claim Form.

Baggage Regulations

Airlines flying between the United States and Costa Rica will expect you to follow these regulations concerning baggage allowance. Please study the specifications below and abide by them. The less you bring, the happier you will be.

Economy class baggage restrictions follow. These are general guidelines and may not be specific to your flight. It is always advisable to check with the airline if you have a question. You may be charged a penalty if you exceed the allowance. Please note that these are baggage regulations of the airlines and not of AIFS.

Checked baggage:

2 Pieces, each bag must:

- Weigh no more than 50 pounds (22.5kg)
- Not exceed 62 inches when you total length plus width plus height

If your baggage exceeds these allowances you may have to pay excess baggage fees.

Carry-on baggage:

1 Piece — Must fit under seat or in overhead compartment. Carry-on luggage may not exceed 45 inches and must weigh less than 40 pounds (18kg).

Please check with your airline regarding liquids. Only very small amounts of liquids are allowed in your carry-on baggage, and must be placed in a clear, sealable plastic bag.

At the airport, it is your responsibility to see that your bags get checked through properly. Make sure your claim stubs have the correct destination on them, and keep them until you have collected your luggage. **These stubs are your receipts.** Airlines will refuse luggage that is improperly tagged.

Put your name and the address of your overseas destination on your baggage tags in case your bags go astray and have to be forwarded to you.

WHAT TO PACK

Deciding what to bring and what to leave behind is a difficult task. Students always find that they bring more clothing than is necessary. Bring as little as you possibly can and try not to bring more than you yourself can carry easily, especially if you plan to travel on your own during or after the program. Closet space in rooms is limited. Remember to leave room for souvenirs and gifts to take back home.

Pack everything you plan to bring with you including your coat, purse, etc., and walk around with all of it for at least 10 minutes. If you can manage everything, you have packed well. If not, reevaluate the contents of your bags.

Because of the varied climate and activities in which you will be involved, be sure to pack appropriate clothing. In the central valley where you will be living and studying, the climate is temperate, around 75° F. However, you will need to pack a few light sweaters and jackets for the evenings and the trip to the Cloud Forest, which can be quite cool. For time spent along the coast and at the beach, light, cool clothes are important. Don't forget to bring clothes for hiking and foul weather. They are a must! The following list will help with packing.

Shoes – You will probably walk more while you are abroad than you ever have before. Make sure that all shoes you pack are comfortable and already broken in. Pack hiking shoes or boots, a pair of sneakers, and a pair of everyday shoes. At least one pair of shoes should be able to be worn casual or dressy so that you do not have to pack both.

Here is a list of clothing and practical items you may want to consider packing. Also listed are clothing and items you should not bring.

Clothing

Do bring:

- Clothing that can be worn in a range of different temperatures and without frequent washings. "Mix and match" items like jeans, T-shirts (long- and short-sleeved), sweatshirts, long-sleeved cotton shirts, light sweaters and/or jackets, etc., can be worn in layers when it is cooler and alone when it is warmer.

- light cotton pants, jeans, skirts, shorts
- Plenty of socks and underwear
- Comfortable walking shoes/boots — waterproof them to extend their wear
- Flip-flops (for the bathrooms)
- Light anorak or windbreaker
- Bathing suit

Do not bring:

- Too many dressy outfits. Generally, you only need to bring one pair of dress shoes and one dressy outfits for a special occasion.
- Clothing with special washing instructions (i.e., "lay flat to dry" or "dry clean only")
- Clothes you *might* wear. Only bring things you are sure to use.

Practical Items

Do bring:

- Basic toiletries — shampoo, moisturizing lotion, toothbrush/toothpaste, dental floss, razor blades, shaving cream, personal hygiene products, deodorant, comb, brush, tissues, lip balm, etc. (Although you will find comparable products, you may not find your favorite brands.)
- Soap and a plastic soap dish that closes
- Battery-operated alarm clock
- Your favorite cosmetics, perfume or cologne — they may not be easy to find abroad
- A basic medical kit containing any pain relievers you typically use (these are difficult to find overseas), cold/cough medicines, Band-Aids, something to counteract an upset stomach, something for motion sickness, antibiotic cream, etc.
- Prescription medication — bring enough to get you through the term, and bring a copy of the prescription with you
- Contact lens supplies, extra eyeglasses, a copy of your eyeglass prescription
- Insect repellent
- Sunglasses (with a cord to keep them around your neck)
- Sunscreen
- Beach towel
- Batteries – they can be expensive abroad
- Portable clothesline

- A box of Wash 'n Dri towelettes
- Photos of your family and friends
- Journal and address book
- Bath towels, a hand towel and washcloths
- ATM Card, some cash and a credit card
- Extra passport photos (useful for extra ID cards)
- Disposable or miniature flashlight
- Camera
- iPod/MP3 Player and charger
- Passport pouch/Money belt
- Photocopy of your passport (kept separate from your original passport—very important). Also leave a copy at home.
- This *Costa Rica Student Handbook* to use as a reference
- Spanish/English dictionary
- A guidebook for Costa Rica
- Pocket calculator

Do not bring:

- Bed linens or a pillow — these items will be provided
- Large or heavy electrical appliances
- School supplies. Loose-leaf paper and notebooks are not necessary since Costa Rican brands will not fit into American binders and vice-versa. Although Costa Rican paper and notebooks are different from what you use, they are easy enough to find.
- American stamps. They have no value outside the U.S. You will be able to buy stamps from the post office overseas.
- The electrical current in Costa Rica is 110 volts – the same as in the U.S., so you shouldn't need an adaptor or electrical converter.
- Irreplaceable, valuable or expensive items.

DO NOT PACK YOUR PASSPORT. KEEP IT WITH YOU AT THE AIRPORT.

TOURIST OFFICE

A wealth of informative and practical literature may be obtained for free from the Costa Rican tourist office, including maps and information on weather, hotels, restaurants and sports.

Tourist Office of Costa Rica

1-800-343-6332

www.visitcostarica.com

YOUTH HOSTEL CARDS

If you are planning to travel on your free weekends you will find it easy to find inexpensive, basic accommodation in Costa Rica. Only if you are planning to travel extensively after the program in would you want to consider purchasing an International Youth Hostel Card before you leave the U.S. IH Youth hostels are reliable and inexpensive, especially for the solo traveler. Hostels are simple, dorm-style lodgings where you may be able to cook your own meals, bathe, sleep and get to know other travelers from around the world. One night at a hostel usually costs between \$10-20. There are 6,000 hostels worldwide although only a handful of these are in Costa Rica. Quality varies, so ask to see your room before paying any money. Once you have registered and paid for the night, you may not be able to get your money back, even if the conditions are unacceptable.

Contact:

Red Costarricense de Albergues Juveniles

P.O. Box 1355-1002 P E

Ave Central, Calles 29 y 31

San José

Tel: 011 506 2234 8186

Fax: 011 506 2224 4085

If you want to purchase a card, you will need to complete an application form and mail it, with a check or money order for \$25, to the Hostelling International — American Youth Hostel Association. To receive an application and booklet, write to:

Hostelling International - American Youth Hostels

733 15th Street NW, Suite 840

Washington, D.C. 20005

202-783-6161

E-mail: [iyhf@hihostels.com](mailto:iyh@hihostels.com)

www.iyhf.org

Youth hostel cards are valid for one year.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)

Acquiring an ISIC is advisable. The discounts to which it entitles you are numerous — museum admission, theater tickets, local transportation, movie tickets, etc. If you get into the habit of asking, you will be surprised by the number of reductions that are available. To obtain the card, check with your home college or university's travel or study abroad office first. If student travel services are not offered on your campus, you can call 1-800-2COUNCIL for information, or visit their website at www.isic.org.

PERSONAL SAFETY ABROAD

Foreigners need to take certain safety precautions abroad. Here are some points to remember:

Blend in. It is not a good idea to stand out or attract undue attention to yourself. Giving the appearance of being a local student will help you to integrate into the host culture. Leave your school sweatshirts, baseball caps and any decidedly American clothing at home.

Women will ultimately face more safety concerns abroad. Dressing conservatively is advised. In some areas you may be harassed by unwanted male followers, pinched or even grabbed. Oftentimes, men may be flirtatious, whistle or make comments such as *bellisima* or *mi amor*. Rarely does this involve contact, but it can be disturbing if you are not used to it. Ignore this behavior. If they continue to bother you, do not make eye contact, ignore them, and walk away. Giving them the attention they seek only encourages their behavior. Be reasonably cautious without being so paranoid that you avoid all locals, male or female. Observe the strategy of local women for fending off unwanted attention. It also helps to use common sense: do not go out alone at night and if you have to, be sure to stay on well-lit, main streets. Santa Barbara and the area of Heredia is generally safe, but this is no reason to abandon common sense.

Be aware of different cultural behavior. What is customary in the U.S. may send the wrong signals in another country. Think about your behavior and be attentive to how the locals behave in your new culture.

Drink wisely. Good judgment should prevail in all circumstances where alcohol will be available. The attitudes towards liquor are different in Costa Rica than in the U.S.; the public drinking age is 18. If you are going to drink, only do so with trusted friends, and be sure at least one friend remains sober.

Be careful with your belongings. Carry a money belt or neck pouch securely inside your clothing, and be aware of your surroundings. Pickpockets are numerous in busy cities. They are most often found in front of hotels and near flea markets, train stations and food markets. Do not carry large sums of cash or credit cards. Bags or purses should be strapped across both neck and shoulder. Never leave them hanging on the backs of chairs in public places. Instead, keep them on the floor between your feet. Men should carry their wallets in their front pockets. Never tell strangers where you are staying, what your travel plans are, etc.

Be careful of *where* and *how* you buy. It is easy to become distracted while making a purchase and get cheated. Be sure that the goods you buy are the ones you actually get. A deal that seems too good to be true probably is. Do not exhibit all of your cash during a purchase. Additionally, it is not wise to display the location of your money, passport or any other valuables. Never opt for convenience over safety and do not allow yourself to be rushed during a purchase.

Choose vehicles wisely. Use only official taxis. Before you get into any cab, make sure that the driver is willing to take you where you want to go. It is also wise to agree on a fare beforehand to avoid any complications when you arrive at your destination. Never get into a cab that already has a passenger.

Use the buddy system whenever possible. If you are out at night, stick to the main avenues and take along a friend or two. Stay away from parks after sunset. If you must go out alone after dark, make sure you tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.

If you plan to jog, do not do so after dark. Be careful of local drivers who may not be used to people running along the road.

If you ever feel you are in a dangerous situation, head for the nearest hotel or restaurant and ask for help.

DRUG ARREST

Almost half the Americans jailed abroad are arrested on drug charges. Despite repeated warnings, drug arrests and convictions are still on the increase. If you are caught with either soft or hard drugs overseas, you are subject to local, not U.S., laws. Penalties for possession or trafficking are often the same. If arrested, you will find that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Most countries will not accept bail.
- Pretrial detention, often solitary confinement, may last months.
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts such as beds, toilets and washbasins.
- Diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives or friends.
- Officials may not speak English.
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading and inhumane treatment and extortion are all possible.

If convicted, you may face a sentence of:

- two to 10 years in most countries;
- a minimum of six years hard labor and a stiff fine in some countries;
- death in countries such as Turkey, Algeria and Iran.

Do not get involved with illegal drugs overseas.

Students should be aware that AIFS takes an extremely serious view of drug use on the program. Action in such cases will involve instant dismissal from the program and the student's university will be informed. Such disciplinary action will be initiated for any student involved in drug use.

It is essential that Costa Rican laws regarding drug use be understood fully. Possession of any drugs, including marijuana, is punishable by law, and the penalties are severe. Overseas visitors convicted of drug-related offenses face enormous fines and deportation from the country. Convictions are frequent for possession of drugs. It is particularly dangerous to purchase from dealers or at clubs, as these people are often police informers. You could be followed home and arrested after purchasing drugs, or your room could be raided by the police after a tip-off.

Smuggling drugs into Costa Rica from abroad is illegal. There is an extremely high chance of being discovered and penalties are very severe, including possible imprisonment.

LEGAL AID

If you have difficulties with the local authorities abroad, remember that you are subject to local laws. Unfortunately, the assistance that American officials can offer is limited by foreign laws, by U.S. laws, and by geography. The U.S. government has no funds for your legal fees and other related expenses.

You should consult a consular officer if you find yourself in a dispute that could lead to legal or police action. Although U.S. consular officers cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find adequate legal representation. It should be noted that the consular attorneys' lists, although carefully prepared, are compiled from local bar association lists and responses to questionnaires. Neither the Department of State nor U.S. embassies or consulates can assume any responsibility for the caliber, competence or professional integrity of the attorney.

Consular officers will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. However, they CANNOT get you out of jail. If you are arrested, ask permission to notify the consular officer at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Under international agreement and practice, you have a right to get in touch with the American Consulate. If you are turned down, keep asking politely and persistently. If unsuccessful, try to have someone get in touch with the consulate for you.

When alerted, American officials will visit you, advise you of your rights according to local laws, and contact your family and friends if you ask them to do so. If your prison facilities are inadequate (as is often the case), consuls can transfer money, food and clothing from your family and friends to the prison authorities. They will try to get relief if you are held under inhumane or unhealthy conditions or treated less favorably than others in the same situation.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is a general term used to describe the feelings of anxiety, frustration, fear or loneliness which people often experience when leaving a familiar socio-cultural environment and moving into a new one. It varies in degree from one individual to another. It occurs in young and old alike, and it can happen within one's own country (for example, a move from California to New York City).

Costa Rica will not have the family, friends and familiar places to which you are accustomed. You will be leaving a climate, geography, eating habits and social behavior you understand well. All of these things will be different in Costa Rica and this will almost inevitably result in some degree of culture shock.

Everyone has problems adapting to a new culture — different food, the strain of speaking a foreign language, etc. Most people start to experience culture shock after several weeks. The symptoms vary from person to person. Some people find they suddenly become short-tempered and annoyed with certain behaviors that characterize the new culture. Others feel tired and lose their enthusiasm to experience new things. They want familiar, comfortable surroundings and habits. Some become depressed and miss very specific people or things from home. Students feel somewhat overwhelmed by the newness of it all during this stage. It is important to remember that this is a stage and that it does go away.

Symptoms can also include fatigue, homesickness, sleeping long hours, preferring to be alone instead of with people, boredom and irritability. You may notice others going through this stage before you realize that you feel it yourself. Talk about culture shock with your friends, roommates or classmates and compare your feelings and impressions. This helps you understand and adjust to cultural differences more quickly. If you experience any of these symptoms, try to control the situation by taking positive steps. Sometimes it is helpful just to know that these feelings are normal, but it also requires effort on your part to turn the situation around. Feel free to talk to the AIFS local Student Advisor. She is experienced in dealing with the symptoms of culture shock and may be able to offer some useful advice.

During the culture shock stage you need to find ways to take care of yourself and the feelings you are experiencing. Past study abroad participants recommend the following:

- Write home instead of calling. Contact old friends, professors and family in the U.S. Ask your family to send clippings from your local newspaper. This will help you feel connected to people at home.
- Keep a journal tracking your journey from start to finish.
- Try to identify particular things you miss. Decide whether they are things for which you can find similar replacements in the new culture or whether they are unique to home. Whenever possible, try to find and enjoy the replacement.
- Do not cut yourself off from people in your host culture. It makes it harder to adjust if you isolate yourself or spend time only with Americans. Try to involve yourself with new friends, teachers and activities. Remind yourself of what is interesting and rewarding about these people and events. Do not focus on the differences between them and the U.S.
- Establish a routine as quickly as possible. Plan your study hours and the days you'll spend exploring and visiting the city. Your time abroad will pass quickly and there's a lot to do.

Students generally pass through a number of phases while working to adapt to a new culture:

- **Initial Excitement:** At first, everything is new and exciting. This phase can vary last anywhere from one week to two months depending on the person. It is characterized by a sense of enthusiasm for the new culture and the feeling that it is not all so different and difficult.
- **Adjustment:** After a while, you will adapt and get used to your new surroundings. You will be able to communicate better in the language. The most frustrating part of the adjustment process has ended. It no longer seems exhausting to get through each day struggling with the language and new customs.

- **Unresolved problems:** Everyone reaches a point of frustration with adjustment. You may feel overwhelmed and wish to return home. **Do not hesitate to see the AIFS Student Advisor.** She is more than willing to listen, help and offer advice. Never feel that you are the only student to experience these emotions.
- **Acclimation/Integration:** Things begin to improve and you feel that you belong. For visiting students, this acclimation is a merging of both your old culture and the new culture. You have not lost American values or habits, but you have integrated them with new customs.
- **Departure Concern:** You begin to feel apprehensive about returning home and readapting to your culture. You have changed as a person and have mixed feelings about going home. You will begin to wonder whether your family and friends can understand the tremendous growth you have experienced. Will you be able to reconnect? These concerns are very real and you will find you have them even after you return to the U.S. There is even something called “reverse culture shock,” which is the adjustment to reassimilate when you return home.

ADVICE FROM FORMER AIFS PARTICIPANTS

Here are some tips and suggestions that will make your term abroad run more smoothly:

- Pack light! You may get sick of wearing the same outfit, but you'll thank yourself when it's time to pack up and go home.
- Casual clothes are of greater necessity than dress clothes.
- Don't pack your suitcase completely full because you will bring home a lot more than you took with you.
- Overestimate the amount of money you will need.
- Keep a journal, diary or travel log and keep notes on everything. It will help record memories and help identify photos later on.
- Bring photos of family, friends, etc.
- Mail is extremely important. Be sure to write to people. A letter is more valuable than an e-mail.
- Bring a guidebook; it will be indispensable.
- Read about all the places you are going to visit. Get maps for each place and mark 10 to 15 things you want to see or do in each place.
- Travel as much as you can, but don't move around so much that you don't get a feel for each country.
- Bring comfortable, sturdy shoes for walking/hiking and break them in before you leave the U.S.
- Keep in mind that some places, like cathedrals, will not admit you sleeveless, in shorts, or in a backless or halter-top. Be considerate of these requirements.

- Ask locals and experienced travelers for recommendations on places to go and things to see, from sites to restaurants, bars and clubs.
- Keep your overseas address with you in case you get lost.
- Bring an extra copy of your birth certificate, two additional passport photos and a photocopy of your passport, just in case the original is lost or stolen. Keep your passport and money in a safe place at all times.
- Purses and bags should have shoulder straps and zippers to deter pickpockets.
- Bring lots of batteries — they are expensive in Costa Rica
- Know that you won't find all the luxuries of home, but you will find the necessities.
- Don't expect to find water fountains, and don't expect to get ice in your drinks.
- Think of every new food as a new dining experience.
- Bring an iPod/MP3 Player and a charger. It is a necessity for those long bus rides.
- Budget your money! You can't afford to spend it all in one place, so plan ahead. Major cities cost more than the countryside.
- Buy your traveler's checks primarily in \$20 and \$50 denominations. Don't carry too much cash with you at one time. Keep a record of your traveler's check numbers and agreements in a safe place, separate from your wallet or purse.
- Bring a roll of toilet paper or mini pack of tissues when you travel around to other regions.
- Always be aware of the time differences when telephoning the United States from abroad.
- Most importantly, go with an open mind and expect differences.

IN COSTA RICA

ARRIVAL & ORIENTATION

When you arrive at the AIFS Study Center, you will be met by your host family and given information about the facilities available to you while in Costa Rica. An orientation program has been designed to help you settle in and acclimate to your new environment as quickly and painlessly as possible.

- During your orientation meeting, you will have the opportunity to talk with faculty and will be given general information about the Study Center, the Santa Barbara and Heredia area and the program's cultural and social activities. The orientation packet will include details about local facilities such as Internet cafes, pharmacies, libraries, churches, shops, museums and restaurants, as well as a map of the local area.
- The local people of Costa Rica are known as “*Ticos/Ticas*” (male/female). Costa Ricans often use the diminutive form of words to be more courteous or friendly. The word *Tico* derives the diminutive of the word *chico* (boy) becoming *chiquitico* (small boy)
- Ticos will do their best – and will even consider it a point of pride – to make your stay as pleasant and educational as possible. They will also expect you to live up to their own high standards. It can be hard to do, but the rewards will be great.

THE STUDY CENTER

The AIFS Study Center is located on a 5 acre campus on the Porrosati Nature Reserve in the town of Santa Barbara in the province of Heredia. The location is ideal for nature enthusiasts with many different kinds of native birds, trees and plants inhabiting the grounds. Heredia city is around 20 minutes away by bus and has most of the amenities of the capital San José but is safer and prettier. Heredia is Costa Rica's smallest and arguably most beautiful province located in the Northern Central part of the country.

AIFS PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Each AIFS campus abroad has staff or representatives to oversee the program. The Program Coordinator is responsible for making sure that all aspects of your experience abroad go well, including your housing and cultural activities.

HOUSING AND MEALS

Living with your Costa Rican homestay family may well prove to be the highlight of your trip. It's the perfect opportunity to not only practice your Spanish, but also immerse yourself in the culture. Costa Rican families are generally warm and welcoming and many students leave feeling they have a surrogate family! Nevertheless you should always bear in mind that you are living in somebody else's home, not a hotel so it's important to stick to the basic rules and regulations of living with a host family and to treat your family with respect and courtesy.

Accommodations

Students are accommodated in single rooms in homestays. Homestays are typically 20 to 30 minutes walk to the Study Center. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided daily. There may be other foreign students also living with your family.

Santa Barbara is a rural area and students should not expect their homestay accommodation to be luxurious. Rooms will generally be much smaller than you are used to as will the size of the beds. Don't expect extras such as Internet connection or TVs in every room. That doesn't mean you won't be comfortable, just that things will be different to what you're used to.

A considerable amount of time is spent on the housing of each student and it is, therefore, essential that all housing questions on the program application be answered honestly and fully, and that you specify any preferred roommates and any special medical conditions. If you feel you did not fully state your needs, please submit any additional information in writing to AIFS. The application housing questionnaire must be returned to AIFS with the passport-sized photos as instructed. The AIFS Program Coordinator reserves the right to change room assignments during the program. The AIFS Program Coordinator also reserves the right to enter students' rooms. However, every effort is made to do so in the presence of the students or with the students' permission.

Students should check in with the AIFS Program Coordinator on a regular basis and must notify her if they are going to be away, even if they will only be away for the night.

Please submit all housing requests in writing to AIFS.

You will be staying in an individual room in your homestay family. If you really wish to share or live close to another student then you should indicate their preference on the AIFS program application. You must request each other. If you decide that you would like to room with someone after you have completed your application, write a letter to the AIFS Partnership Registrar at AIFS, Partnership Programs, College Division, River Plaza, 9 West Broad Street, Stamford, CT 06902, and have your prospective roommate do the same. Please note that there is no guarantee that your request can be accommodated.

What You Can Expect in Homestays

- **Meals.** You will be provided with three meals a day. Meals require some readjustment of eating habits, especially your schedule. Do not expect American food. Food is a very important part of any culture, so try everything! Keep in mind that the Costa Rican diet is very healthy.

Breakfast in Costa Rica is continental, in the strictest sense of the word. It consists of *gallo pinto* (rice and beans) with fried or scrambled egg and *natilla* (sour cream), fruit, toast, juice and coffee with milk, or hot chocolate, and muffins or cookies. The main meal or "almuerzo," consisting of two courses followed by fruit, is served at about noon. "Cena" (dinner) is a lighter meal and is served around 6 or 7 p.m. The main staple of the Costa Rican meal is rice and beans. Locals often have *Casado* – meaning a "marriage" of rice and beans with plantain, salad and beef (*bistek*), chicken (*pollo*) or fish (*pescado*). Other specialties include *Olla de Carne* – a beef and vegetable soup containing potatoes, plantains, yucca, corn and squash, *empanadas* – corn turnovers filled with beans, cheese, or potatoes and meat, and *sopa negra* – soup made from bean gravy, with a hard boiled egg and vegetables added.

- Vegetarians are not abundant in Costa Rica. You must be specific if you want something without meat when ordering food.
- Exotic fruits and vegetables are readily available. Be sure to wash fruits and vegetables properly before eating. The water in Santa Barbara and in most major towns is drinkable. However if you have a very sensitive stomach or you are wary, bottled water is available.
- **Room.** Your Doña (homestay mom) will clean your room to a certain extent, but she will not provide the equivalent of maid service. Make your bed every day, even if you don't do this at home. Keep your room tidy and the bathroom neat and clean.

Housing Rules

Successful communal living requires consideration for those around you. We would appreciate your cooperation in observing the following rules during your stay.

- Good behavior is a must if everyone is to get along well. Therefore, please do not play music loudly, disturb your roommate or family if you return late at night, or talk loudly.
- No overnight guests are allowed for security and insurance reasons. If you have friends visiting you, the AIFS Program Coordinator will be able to help you find them a place to stay.
- Never leave doors unlocked or windows open. You are responsible for the security of your own belongings and should take all necessary precautions.
- Please keep your room tidy and do not leave items on the floor.
- Please be aware that any damage, including charges for extra cleaning, will be charged to your damage deposit.

Linen

Towels are not provided. Bring your own or buy them when you arrive.

Clean linen (i.e., two sheets, one pillowcase) is provided weekly. Blankets are also provided. Rooms will be cleaned and trash bins emptied by your Doña. Students should keep their rooms as tidy as possible.

Additional Advice for Students Living with Host Families

Do:

- Remember that living in someone else's home is an adjustment for them as well as for you. Be aware of the daily routine in the household, and adapt to it. Be as patient, flexible and cooperative as possible.
- Be willing to make the effort to get to know your hosts and converse in Spanish from the very beginning. Your family will really appreciate the effort you put in, even if your Spanish is basic. Contact with them is often limited to meals and evenings, if time permits. If you are able and willing to communicate in the language of your hosts, even in the most elementary way, adaptation will be made that much easier.

- Be prepared to try foods that you have not had before. Be careful not to offend your hosts by rejecting their cooking. Be tactful in letting them know that there are certain foods you do not like or cannot eat. In turn, let them know what foods you do like. The best policy is to be open, honest and polite. It is important to be punctual for meals so that you do not keep your hosts waiting.
- The kitchen is a Costa Rican woman's domain. Ask permission to enter and do not help yourself to food or drink without your host's okay first. You should be able to store food items in the kitchen but not in your bedroom.
- If you come home late at night, be quiet. You do not have a curfew, but do not disturb everyone in the house in the middle of the night.
- Buy a plant or a box of chocolates for your hosts a week or so after you arrive. Do not spend much money on the gift – it is the gesture that will be appreciated. If you wish to bring something with you before you depart the U.S., consider purchasing a gift that is unique to your particular hometown, state or region.
- Don't invite friends over to visit without first asking permission. Most socializing in Costa Rica is done outside the home.
- Take short showers. Some Costa Rican homes may not have hot water available 24 hours a day. Also, there may be only one bathroom in the house, so you should not monopolize the shower at key times of the day.
- Make your bed every day and keep your room neat and clean, even if you aren't tidy by nature. A messy room will upset your hosts.

Don't:

- Be insensitive in your behavior in the home. For example, do not put your feet on furniture, play your music so loud it can be heard in other rooms, or leave the kitchen or bathroom untidy.
- Help yourself to food or drink unless you are invited to do so.
- Expect your hosts to have a telephone. If they do have a phone, you may not be allowed to use it. Costa Rican phone bills are extremely expensive. If you do have permission to use the phone, make calling card calls only. Free local calls do not exist in Costa Rica. Costa Ricans are charged for all calls regardless of distance.
- Do not lose track of your house key. If you lose it, you will be responsible for paying to have the locks replaced.

Making Your Own Living Arrangements

AIFS recommends that students take advantage of the housing we provide. Under exceptional circumstances students may provide their own housing. Please note that the AIFS staff cannot personally assist you in your search for an apartment, and if you choose this option you will then be wholly responsible for all aspects of your housing (contracts, bills, utilities, etc.).

Any student choosing this option must notify AIFS on the program application and provide AIFS with a contact address and phone number in case of emergency.

TIME

Costa Rica is in the same time zone as U.S. Mountain Standard Time. In Costa Rica you will be one hour ahead of California.

COMMUNICATION

Students may receive mail and faxes at the Study Center.

Overseas phone calls can be made from public telephone boxes using coins, calling cards or pay as you go phone cards. You may dial direct or you may reverse the charges.

You are advised to bring an AT&T, MCI or Sprint calling card with you. Be sure to obtain your phone company's access number to dial from Costa Rica and any specific dialing instructions before you depart the U.S.

If a relative or guardian needs to reach you in case of an emergency, they should call the AIFS office in Stamford, Connecticut, during office hours (Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern Time) at (800) 727-2437. If the emergency occurs outside of regular office hours, they should dial the same number. The message will prompt them to call or hold for the AIFS answering service that will take a message and contact the College Division duty officer on call. During the orientation session, students will also receive a number where the AIFS Student Advisor can be reached in an emergency.

Your AIFS Study Center street address is:

Amistad Institute S.A.
Frente EBAIS
Barrio Jesus
Santa Barbara
Heredia
Costa Rica (Give this address to your taxi driver.)

The mailing address is:

Amistad Institute
Apartado Postal 258 - 3009
Santa Barbara de Heredia
Costa Rica

Telephone: (506) 2269 0000/ 2269 6591
Fax: (506) 2269 0000

When dialing from the U.S always prefix the number with 011 506

When dialing from Costa Rica to the U.S prefix the number with 001

Be sure to leave this address with family and friends.

ACADEMIC LIFE

While studying abroad you will encounter some new educational styles. Students are encouraged to work on their own and to use the greatest variety of works possible in their studies. American lecture halls tend to be much larger than classes abroad.

It will be of vital importance to have a good Spanish dictionary. Most students bring a comprehensive version for reference when reading and a portable edition to carry with them. Ask your language professor for a recommendation.

Your home institution will handle all matters pertaining to course selection and credit. Make sure that you have thoroughly discussed your plans with your advisor ahead of time.

Classes are normally held at the AIFS Study Center Monday through Thursday according to class schedule.

There will be an academic orientation at the start of the program that will cover classroom and course information, and any other issues related to the academic aspects of the program.

COMPUTERS

Internet/E-mail Access

There is wifi access at the school, and a limited number of computers which will operate on a sign up basis. You will also find cyber cafés in Santa Barbara.

If you choose to bring a laptop computer, please remember that computers can be easily damaged during travel, and they can be affected by power fluctuations in Costa Rica. Also, check and make sure you have insurance on your computer as the AIFS policy excludes computers and related equipment.

TRAVEL

Travel out of Santa Barbara

Although the buses are not that comfortable and, to the uninitiated and faint-of-heart, the system can seem incredibly frenetic, the good news is that the fares are generally cheap – no destination is more than \$15 away. There are three major bus depots in the main city of San José: the Coca-Cola depot (about a twenty-minute walk east from the city center, down Avenidas 1); the understated Atlántico Norte terminal; and the Caribe terminal (north of Avenida 13 on Calle Central).

Taxis are considered a viable form of public transportation for long journeys, and can be hired by the day, half-day or hour. You can share the fare with three friends.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE

AIFS works with local doctors that treat students in their offices. There is a clinic opposite the School and a larger medical center in Santa Barbara. Consult your AIFS Program Coordinator for detailed information.

Most medical treatment, including hospital and private consultation, has to be paid for privately, apart from certain exemptions such as casualty and emergency treatment.

These charges can, however, be reclaimed through the AIFS group insurance plan which covers all students on the program, subject to the conditions of the policy. Students must pay the \$50 deductible for each covered injury or illness. Detailed listings of doctors in your area are available from the AIFS Program Coordinator. The AIFS Program Coordinator can make appointments for you and will provide you with a *Medical Claim Form* for the doctor to sign. **Be sure to take the *Medical Claim Form* with you to the doctor, as it must be completed in order to file a claim.** Keep all receipts from any doctor visits or for any medications and submit them with the claim form. Refunds can only be processed with a completed form and accompanying receipts.

Details of other medical services are also available upon request from the AIFS Program Coordinator, e.g., dentistry, family planning, homeopathy, chiropractic, etc.

Counseling

Some of you may be away from home for the first time, and even if you are used to living in a dorm, adjusting to life in a new city and a different culture can be very tough at first. During the first few days, it's natural to feel a little strange, disoriented and homesick, especially if also suffering from jetlag. If you feel any of these symptoms when you arrive or experience any other kind of problem during your stay in Costa Rica, whether personal, practical or academic, do not hesitate to seek help and support from the AIFS Program Coordinator. AIFS is concerned about student welfare and can help when individual problems occur.

CLIMATE

Costa Rica has two seasons: The rainy or "green" season (May through November), also referred to as "winter," and the dry season (December to April), or "summer." The two coastlines of Costa Rica boast beautiful beaches each with its own climate and terrain. The Pacific Coast, which stretches twice the distance of the Caribbean Coast, has a dry climate with large, expansive beaches. The Caribbean coast has a more humid, tropical climate with beaches of both white and black sand. The central valley of Costa Rica where Heredia is located is an area of rich, fertile land with beautiful countryside. It is also the meeting point of two mountain ranges. Santa Barbara, where you will be studying and living, has a temperate climate with an average temperature of 75°F. It's likely to be sunny in the morning with some heavy but brief rain showers in the afternoon.

ELECTRICITY

Costa Rica uses the same voltage as the U.S. – 110 volts. If you have any appliances with three-prong plugs, you will need an adapter.



Utilities in Costa Rica are very expensive. Consequently, Costa Ricans are very conscious of lights left on when no one is in the room, wasted hot water and unnecessary phone calls.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In order to help students gain maximum benefit from their stay in Costa Rica, social and cultural activities will be organized. Upon arrival in Costa Rica students are taken on an informal walking tour of Santa Barbara to see the principal sights and visit places that are frequented by the student population.

SPORTS

Sports are an important past time in Costa Rica. Football (soccer) is the national sport. Water sports, including swimming, surfing, water skiing, sailing, whitewater rafting and windsurfing, to name a few, are all within easy reach. Gyms and health clubs are also popular.

Facilities in Santa Barbara are fairly limited, however they do have the necessities including a couple of gyms. Some students also like to jog. It is possible to go horseback riding in the area. Many students find the walking they do in Costa Rica gives them plenty of exercise.

Q & A

Will there be field trips?

Yes! The cost of these trips is included in your AIFS fee. Throughout the program, regular weekly events will take place that cost little or are free. You will be very busy.

Can I work while in Costa Rica?

No, not to earn money. Work permits are difficult to obtain.

Must I fly with AIFS?

No. However, if you purchase the AIFS Transportation Package, you will receive round-trip airport transfers in San José as part of the package. If you make your own flight arrangements, you are responsible for arranging your own transfer from Juan Santamaria airport in San José and for any costs involved.

If you will be providing your own transportation, be sure to complete and send back to the AIFS Stamford office the *Travel Information Form* that was sent with your acceptance materials.

Can I change my return flight?

Maybe. For a fee and subject to agent and airline approval and availability, you may try to change your return flight date only. This can only be done once you are on site in Costa Rica and no less than 2 weeks prior to your scheduled departure date. Only date changes may be allowed; there can be no

changes to the routing, and there will be agent and airline-imposed fees that could be as high as \$250-300. Additionally, if you have a connecting flight in the U.S., you must check whether you are able to change that U.S. domestic flight, since some cannot be changed. Ask your AIFS Program Coordinator for details.

How long after the program ends will my damage deposit be refunded?

Your damage deposit refund will be processed approximately eight to 10 weeks after the end of your program. It will be mailed to the address we had on file for you prior to your departure. Be sure to send us your new address if the address on file is no longer valid.

Do I get a refund if I change my mind and decide not to go on the program?

Carefully read the AIFS refund policy on the application. When you sign your application, you sign a statement indicating your understanding of the refund policy and your compliance with it.

How much luggage can I bring?

Airlines have size limits and they impose a high surcharge for excess weight. Read the information in this Handbook and contact the airline directly for the latest regulations.