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Costa Rica Spanish Language School

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Costa Rica Spanish Language School **Trip Code:** CRSL **Duration:** From 1 week

Trip Highlights

- Work your way from Spanish beginner to Spanish expert in small classes
- Put your new skills to the test in one of Central America's most fascinating destinations!
- Make the most of a whole host of optional extras from salsa to cookery classes

Overview

Put yourself at an immediate advantage in Central America by taking lessons in Spanish, in Costa Rica at whatever level suits you.

Our language school provides a unique Spanish language experience with emphasis on participants understanding the culture, as well as learning the language. With small classes every day, plenty of fun cultural activities in the afternoons and a home stay with a local family you'll be able to practice your new found skills and immerse yourself in Costa Rican life.

Destination Info

The language school is based in the small and beautiful city of Heredia which is 10km north of San Jose. The city is locally known as the "City of Flowers" as it boasts a breathtaking array of gardens and stunning natural flora. The city is also famous for its colonial architecture and history buffs will be able to spot plenty of gems which include the historic La Inmaculada Concepcion church and the El Fortin tower.

Itinerary

Costa Rica Spanish Language School

The school provides a unique Spanish language experience as emphasis is made on participants understanding the culture, as well as learning the language. Fun cultural activities will be included in your programme such as free cooking lessons and Latin dance lessons.

The aim at the school is to make the lessons interesting and fun, as this is the best way to learn a language quickly and easily. The teaching approaches are dynamic and varied and the classes are intensive, yet challenging and enjoyable. All the teachers are trained and have an University degree in Education.

The small classes and active participation training provides the flexibility to meet your individual needs and offer you a comprehensive course. The classes consider Spanish as a whole and as well as there being an emphasis on speaking abilities, they also take into account grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, pragmatic use and cultural understanding.

08:00-12:00 Morning classes (with 20 min break)

After your Spanish classes you will have the chance to participate in afternoon cultural activities:

- Latin dance classes (Tuesdays from 15:00-16:45)
- Cooking classes (Wednesdays from 15:00-16:45)

- Tropical Fruits Lessons (Thursdays from 15:00-16:45) to learn the names and taste some of the exquisite tropical fruits Costa Rica has to offer.

Please note: Itineraries and activities are subject to change.

Accommodation

You will be staying with a home stay family, with a maximum of two sharing a bedroom at the house. Staying with a local family is the perfect way for you to learn more about the Costa Rican culture. You will have the opportunity to practice speaking Spanish with the family everyday and learn about the Costa Rican way of life.

We make sure that the host families we use have clean, secure, comfortable homes and all families are carefully selected for their hospitality, friendliness and warmth. Each home will have been visited and checked by a co-ordinator and are located no more than 2 km away from the school.

Programme Services and Facilities

Internet

There is free Internet access at the language school, which is available to all students to use during their free time. You will also find several Internet cafes around the city of Alajuela, which usually charge around $1.00 per hour.

Telephone

There are plenty of public telephones in San Jose and all over Costa Rica. These will usually operate with phone cards, which you can purchase from small shops and kiosks. Please check that the phone card you buy is suitable for international calls.

Your mobile phone may or may not work in Costa Rica, depending on your network, and if it does, please be aware that in many areas you may not always get a signal.

The international dialling code for Costa Rica is +506.

Laundry

There will be laundry facilities at your home stay, though be aware that you may have to wash your own clothes.

Meals

Your host family will provide you with breakfast and dinner every day. You should be able to get delicious and fairly cheap lunch in the city after your lessons.

What's Included

- Airport pick up
- Home stay accommodation
- Breakfast and dinner
- Spanish classes
- Weekly Latin Dance classes
- Weekly Costa Rican Cooking classes
- Weekly conversation classes
- 24 hour emergency support number

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Travel insurance
- Lunch
- Alcohol beverages
- Local transport

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore you may not need all of the listed items on your travels.

Personal Admin

- Passport, insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money
- Cash for airport departure tax
- Proof of inoculations (please speak to your GP about necessary immunisations)
- Guidebook on country – recommended Lonely Planet or Footprints

General

- Camera / Film / Batteries
- Notebooks and pens, diary etc
- Torch / Extra Batteries
- Sunglasses
- Pocket-knife (comes in handy for general use – please do not pack in your hand luggage!)
- Water bottle – at least one litre
- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use

- A 3-Season Sleeping bag (especially useful when on weekend excursions)
- Mosquito Net (if required)
- Personal enjoyment - books, cards, music etc.
- Personal hygiene items (deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrush etc)
- Spanish dictionary, verb book etc

Clothing

- Hat
- Comfortable walking shoes
- A pair of thick socks for walking
- Sandals
- Waterproof Jacket
- Fleece/pullover (for cool evenings)
- Long trousers
- Warmer clothing for winter
- Swimwear
- Towel

Medical Kit

- Personal medication
- First Aid Kit (e.g. Antihistamines, Anti- diarrhoea tablets, headache tablets)
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito and insect repellent

Minimum Age

Minimum 18 years, maximum decided on potential participants' health.

Flights

Your flight to Costa Rica should arrive at Juan Santamaria International Airport (SJO), San Jose, Costa Rica at any time on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

Please note: If you are flying to Costa Rica via the USA you will need to obtain Travel Authorisation by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) no later than 72 hours before departure. This is compulsory and will cost USD$14 to register. To register, please visit: www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

FAQs

1. **Do I need to know any Spanish beforehand?**
   No, they teach complete beginners to advanced level.

2. **When will I have some free time?**
   You will get the weekends to explore and go on excursions.

3. **How will they know what level to put me in?**
   You will be given a test at the beginning and put into the relevant groups. You will be moved up or down in groups depending on how fast you pick it up so you are always comfortable.

4. **Will I be on my own in the host family**
   We try to place you with other students in host families and the sooner you book the more chance you will have of this happening.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The currency in Costa Rican is the Colón (CRC), which is subdivided into 100 Céntimos. Coins come in

denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100 and notes come in denominations of 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000.

While Costa Rica's close proximity to North America means that US Dollars are widely accepted at most establishments in Buena Vista and some large country towns, it is advisable to have some local currency to pay for transportation or goods at smaller establishments.

Credit cards such as MasterCard and Visa are accepted in cities and most tourist areas, though use in less commercial areas may be limited. This is also true of ATM machines or 'Cajeros automáticos'. ATMs commonly dispense both US Dollars and Nuevos Soles and usually charge for using international cards.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant $8.46
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) $1.66
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $1.29
Water (0.33 litre bottle) $0.96

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Citizens of the European Union, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia will be issued a Tourist Visa on entry for stays of up to 90 days. For longer stays or other nationalities, please consult your nearest Costa Rican Embassy or High Commission.

Cultural Considerations

Costa Rica is caught between old cultural forces and new ones. Family ties are strong, and the major traditions within family are often strongly religious, such as: baptisms, first communions, engagement parties, weddings and funerals. Gender roles tend to be fairly traditional, though in urban areas women's opportunities are improving all the time. The Costa Ricans are friendly people and it is customary to greet and part with handshakes.

Religion

Roman Catholicism is the official religion and about 90% of the population is Roman Catholic. Religion is an important part of life in Costa Rica, and we would urge you to be respectful at all times in and around places of worship. Do not be surprised to see individuals crossing themselves when passing any object of religious significance or reciting religious adages at appropriate times.

Clothing

Casual dress is fine but you should avoid beachwear away from the coast and dress conservatively, especially in rural areas, which tend to be fairly traditional and religious. When entering a religious area, please make sure you are appropriately covered.

Tipping

A 10% service charge and 13% tax is automatically added to restaurant bills. Taxi drivers are usually not tipped.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Unfortunately, tourists are often targets for pickpockets and thieves. Please educate yourself about South America and Costa Rica in particular, before you leave, so that you can be alert to all types of situations. Safety guidelines will be covered in detail at your orientation session upon arrival but please familiarise yourself with the following general travel safety rules.

- Avoid travelling alone, especially at night.
- Find out where the unsafe areas are and avoid them.
- When travelling keep all-important documents and valuables in a safe place, like an inner hidden pocket or money belt.
- Carry only as much cash as you think you will need for the day.
- Don’t wear expensive jewellery or watches.
- Be wary of people who seem too friendly too fast.
- Keep cameras out of sight. Always keep bags and purses in your sight, especially on public transport.
- Before swimming, ask how safe the area is.

In Costa Rica you should avoid sleeping on beaches or camping outside of official sites, as unprotected areas can be dangerous at night. Riptides (or ripcurrents) are a problem in the seas of Costa Rica, and can be very dangerous. Always follow beach guidelines and do not swim or surf against the advice of the coastguard.

We advise that you check your government’s advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

Language Guide

The main spoken language in Costa Rica is Spanish. Here are a few basic phrases that should help you get by during your trip. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello - *Hola!*

Good day - *Buenas dias!*
How are you? - *Como estas? ('Como estas usted?' if you need to be extra formal!)*
Goodbye - *Adios*
Please - *Por favour*
Thank you - *Gracias*
I don't understand - *No entiendo*
I don't speak Spanish - *No hablo espanol*
Sorry/excuse me - *Lo siento*
Where is…? - *Donde esta…?*
The bill please - *La cuenta por favour*

Food & Drink

The standards of health and hygiene are among the best in Latin America - milk, ice cream and other dairy products are safe. Avoid uncooked meats. If you are at all unsure about something, remember it is always better to be safe than sorry. Typical dishes of Costa Rica include:

- Gallos - Filled tortillas
- Casado - Rice, beans, beef or fish, fried plantain, chopped cabbage
- Arreglados - Puff pastries filled with beef, chicken, vegetables or cheese
- Sopa Negra - Soup with black beans and an egg in it
- Gallo Pinto - Rice & beans with sour cream or fried eggs

Drinks

You can drink tap water in most major towns, though be advised that it is heavily chlorinated. In other locations bottled water is readily available.

There are many types of cold fruit drinks, (made with milk or water). They are very popular and most of them are delicious. Coffee is usually good. The local beers are Bavaria, Pilsen, Imperial and Tropical.

Smoking / Alcohol / Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Costa Rica, and readily available. However, please respect other volunteers. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Many regions in Costa Rica have banned or limited smoking in public places and many restaurants will have a separate seating area for those wishing to smoke.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Costa Rica. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Costa Rica has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Public Holidays

To view a list of the public holidays for Costa Rica, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/costa-rica/

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. Many schools, government offices, stores and banks are closed on National Holidays. Please note that there may be slight date variations for some of the holidays each year and that the list is not exhaustive.

Weather

Temperatures in Costa Rica are high throughout the year with the warmest weather on the lowlands and the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. San Jose and other mountainous areas are cooler and vary between 16-26°. The hottest months of the year are between March and April with the rainy season falling between March and November; the coast is humid and rainy for most of the year.

Time

Costa Rica is six hours behind GMT.

Electricity

In Costa Rica the electric system is 120 Volts and frequency 60 Hertz. If your device does not accept electricity at

this voltage you will need an adapter.

Outlets in Costa Rica generally accept 1 type of plug:

Flat blade plug

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

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