



## STUDENT HANDBOOK

Costa Rica Globalization, Development and Environment Monteverde Institute



Please contact your Study Abroad Office for more information Or visit: [www.monteverde-institute.org](http://www.monteverde-institute.org)



Spanish and Culture in ----- Costa Rica



For more information visit your Study Abroad Office \_\_\_\_\_ or visit: [www.monteverde-institute.org](http://www.monteverde-institute.org)

Education and Culture in Rural Costa Rica

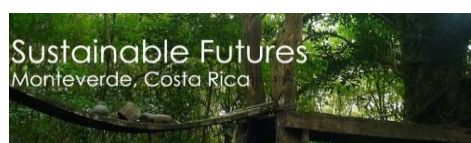


For more information visit your Study Abroad Office----- Monteverde - COSTA RICA

Tropical Biology and Conservation in Costa Rica



For more information visit your Study Abroad Office----



Student Orientation Handbook



**"A Community Health Field Course in Costa Rica"**  
Get an inside look at community health and healthcare in Costa Rica...



## Table of Contents

Procedures and considerations prior to visiting Costa Rica .....	6
I. ABOUT THE MONTEVERDE INSTITUTE .....	8
What is the Monteverde Institute? .....	8
Facilities at the Monteverde Institute .....	9
Classrooms.....	9
Auditorium.....	9
Campbell Library.....	9
Kitchen, Bathroom, and Other Facilities .....	9
Resources .....	10
Audiovisual and other Equipment.....	10
Postal Service.....	10
Computers, Internet, and Telecommunications .....	10
Internet access .....	11
Phones .....	11
Bulletin boards.....	11
MVI Campus and the Crandell Memorial Reserve .....	11
Other opportunities at the Monteverde Institute.....	12
Monteverde Institute Center for Community Initiatives .....	12
II. GENERAL INFORMATION ON COSTA RICA.....	13
Country Background .....	13
Visa and Passport Requirements.....	14
US and Other Embassies.....	14
Telecommunications and cell phones .....	15
Time zone .....	15
Electricity .....	15
Currency, Weights, and Measurements.....	15
Holidays .....	15
Shopping.....	16
In case of political or social unrest .....	16
III. ABOUT THE MONTEVERDE ZONE .....	17



General Background .....	17
Life in Monteverde: What to Expect .....	18
Clinics, Banks, Shopping, and Other Facilities .....	18
Activities in Monteverde .....	19
Stray and wild animals.....	20
Getting around Monteverde .....	20
Local public bus service .....	20
Taxi service .....	20
IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDYING ABROAD.....	21
Norms and Practices in Costa Rica .....	22
Language.....	22
Greetings .....	22
Food.....	22
Clothing.....	23
Personal Electronic Devices.....	23
Personal Hygiene and Bathroom Etiquette.....	23
Gift-giving .....	23
Culture Shock.....	24
Suggested Packing List.....	24
Short Courses (3 weeks or less).....	24
Semester Courses .....	26
V. PLACE-BASED ACADEMICS .....	27
Course Coordination.....	27
Specific to semester-long courses .....	27
MVI Student Code of Conduct.....	29
Violations of Costa Rican Law.....	29
Misconduct .....	30
Violations of Monteverde Institute policies:.....	30
Discipline .....	31
VI. HEALTH AND SAFETY .....	32
Medical needs, health insurance coverage, medications, and pre-existing conditions.....	32
Common Illnesses and What to do if You Get Sick.....	33



Sexually-Transmitted Infections .....	33
Hydration and Tropical Sun Awareness.....	33
Food and Beverages .....	34
Water and Sanitation .....	34
Safety.....	34
At home .....	34
Road safety and motorized vehicles.....	35
General Outdoor Safety.....	35
Natural Disasters .....	36
Personal Safety and Crime.....	36
In Case of Emergency .....	37
For Women.....	37
Drugs and Alcohol.....	38
Alcohol.....	38
Smoking .....	38
Illicit Drugs .....	39
VII. APPENDICES .....	40
Appendix I: Map of the Monteverde Institute Campus .....	40
Appendix II: Map of Monteverde and Santa Elena .....	41
Appendix III: Metric Conversion Table .....	42
Appendix IV: Map of Costa Rica .....	43
Appendix V: Natural Disaster Safety .....	44
Earthquake – <i>Terremoto</i> (Tremor – <i>Temblor</i> ): .....	44
Landslides (derrumbe or deslizamiento).....	47
Fire (fuego or incendio) .....	48
High Winds.....	49
Lightning .....	49
Flood and Flash Flood ( <i>inundación</i> and <i>cabeza de agua</i> ).....	50
Ocean Safety.....	51
Dehydration and heat emergencies .....	52
Rip Tides .....	52
Crocodiles .....	55



Appendix VI: Tips for Decreasing the Risk of Sexual Assault .....	57
Appendix VII: What to do in Case of Sexual Assault in Costa Rica .....	61
EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS BY LOCATION.....	65

**Disclaimer:**

The Monteverde Institute provides the following information with the intention of enhancing your study abroad experience including safeguarding your health and well-being. The information in this handbook are recommendations only, compiled from many resources as well as student’s experiences in Costa Rica. While your personal judgment supersedes all recommendations given in this handbook, compliance with specific rules of the Monteverde Institute is mandatory.





## Procedures and considerations prior to visiting Costa Rica

MVI policy is to collaborate as much as possible and to our best abilities with the sending institution's policies and protocols. Important elements to consider when traveling to Costa Rica include:

### DOCUMENTS TO CARRY WITH YOU:

- ☐ **Passport:** If you do not already have one, apply for it now. Your passport must be valid through the date of your return to the US or Canada, and valid for at least six months beyond your arrival in Costa Rica if you are from another country.
- ☐ **Visa and F1 visa:** US citizens do **not** need to obtain a visa before entry into Costa Rica. **Please check your visa upon entrance and immediately advise your course coordinator if it is less than 90 days.** If you are traveling on a non-US passport you may be required to obtain a visa to enter Costa Rica. Check with your university or school and the Costa Rican consular website for current requirements. Begin the process early, as it can take as long as six months to obtain a visa. You must notify our international studies department if you do not hold a US or Canadian passport as visa regulations vary with country and visa lengths may not coincide with your course. We will offer information and assistance to rectify this situation, if possible, with advance notice. Please present your F1 student visa when presenting your passport.
- ☐ **Letter of invitation from the Monteverde Institute:** You will need to present this at the immigration desk when you enter Costa Rica (For programs more than 90 days).
- ☐ **Airline ticket to and from Costa Rica:** Proof of onward travel (airline or bus ticket to leave Costa Rica) is a requirement for entering the country.
- ☐ **Proof of economic solvency:** A minimum of \$100US for every 30 days you will be in Costa Rica is required.
- ☐ **Proof of yellow fever vaccine:** if you are arriving or if you have traveled from certain countries in South America or Africa. See details in the Handbook. (page 32)  
Check <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CostaRica.html#ExternalPopup>  
<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/preparing/yellow-fever-vaccine-malaria-prevention-by-country/costa-rica>

### OTHER ITEMS TO BRING WITH YOU:

- ☐ Prescription and other medications. Epi-pens are not available in Costa Rica (epinephrine is).
- ☐ Items listed on the packing list (see page 25).

### TO DO BEFORE DEPARTURE:



- ☐ Read the Monteverde Institute Student Handbook carefully. Please address questions and concerns about the Handbook and MVI policies to [academicdirector@mvinstitute.org](mailto:academicdirector@mvinstitute.org) and [academic@mvinstitute.org](mailto:academic@mvinstitute.org).
- ☐ Submit completed forms to the Monteverde Institute either on-line or to [logistica@mvinstitute.org](mailto:logistica@mvinstitute.org). If you are a minor, make sure you have your parent or guardian's signature on the MVI Participant Contract and Liability Waiver.
- ☐ Cut the bottom off the "Student Information Sheet" and leave it with anyone who might need to contact you while you are in Costa Rica.
- ☐ Obtain international health insurance (if your existing policy does not cover international travel).
- ☐ Arrange for any necessary immunizations.
- ☐ If you bring a laptop computer, we strongly encourage you to get it insured. The Monteverde Institute is not liable for any damage that occurs to your computer during your time in Costa Rica.
- ☐ Leave copies your passport, itinerary, and insurance information with your family or emergency contact and with the International Programs Office of your home institution. This is very important in case your passport is lost or stolen.
- ☐ Notify your bank of your travel plans if you plan on using a credit or debit card while abroad. Consider leaving a copy of credit and debit cards at home.
- ☐ Check your phone service provider's policy for international plans for use US cell phone in Costa Rica.
- ☐ Check the packing list. Pack only what you will need. Remember that you will be responsible for carrying your own luggage, so pack accordingly.
- ☐ Understand and plan for your airline's luggage policy. Include the following on your luggage tags: Instituto Monteverde 2645-5053.
- ☐ Check current information on weather, travel requirements/advisories, and any updates.
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with Costa Rican law/legal system and culture.
- ☐ If you will be away during an election, file necessary paperwork for absentee voting.
- ☐ **Confirm your flight. If there are any changes or cancellations, notify MVI at [academicdirector@mvinstitute.org](mailto:academicdirector@mvinstitute.org).**



## I. ABOUT THE MONTEVERDE INSTITUTE

### What is the Monteverde Institute?

The Monteverde Institute (MVI) is a Costa Rican non-profit association dedicated to advancing the knowledge and practice of sustainable living through education, applied research, and community engagement. Connecting local communities and organizations to the wider international academic community, the Institute seeks to understand, find appropriate solutions to, and disseminate information on the environmental, social, cultural and economic issues faced by Monteverde and communities around the world.

Education through community-based learning is at the heart of the Institute's efforts and plays a key role in our vision for a sustainable future. Whether you are participating in a course on tropical biology, conservation, agro-ecology, sustainable development, community health, education, planning and architecture, or Spanish language and local culture, our goal is to help ground the academic focus within a real context, and help you learn first-hand what these topics mean for individuals, families, and communities.

As your host institution in Costa Rica, our goal is to make your educational experience as meaningful as possible. For many students this experience can be life-changing. Your course may include presentations from world-renowned scientists as well as local residents and activists. You may visit well-known tourist attractions and small family farms off the tourist track. While marveling at a beautiful lake and volcano, you will also learn about the importance, contradictions, and challenges of hydroelectric power. If you are participating in a homestay, you will have the opportunity to practice Spanish and to learn what everyday life is like for Costa Rican families. You may have the chance to do volunteer community service, participate in a research project, or conduct your own study. Whatever the focus of your course, the Institute works with your university, school, or group to create a rich experience.

Your safety and well-being are of utmost importance to the Institute. Pre-trip preparations, course operations, and your cooperation all work to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Depending on the

agreement with your home institution, the Institute oversees your itinerary, accommodations, meals, transportation, and educational activities during your course. Providing your diet and health information is a requirement so that we can meet your personal needs. Reading this manual and the packing list is an important step to transition into Costa Rican society and habitats. Bringing your personal necessities is very important, especially medications which you may not find here. Planning for rain, a range of temperatures, different environments, customs, and events is key.

At the local level, the Institute works closely with the local government and organizations, and participates in several commissions and regional NGO networks. We offer classes and workshops to





community members, and while you are here you might see community meetings taking place at the Institute. Please see our website for ongoing [community initiatives](#) and how you might help.

Watch our [introductory video online](#) and check out more videos about the Monteverde Institute on our [YouTube channel](#).

## **Facilities at the Monteverde Institute**

While in Monteverde, the Institute will be your home campus. Our facilities and resources include classrooms, laboratory, library, auditorium, reception area, kitchen, gardens, outside sitting areas, green space, trails, and a private reserve, as well as Wi-Fi internet, copier, plotter, and computers. There may be other groups, interns, and researchers at the Institute at the same time, which provides a great opportunity to make new contacts and friends. Please be considerate of others while sharing these facilities and resources.

### **Classrooms**

Classrooms are located in different parts of the Institute (see Appendix I) and are reserved ahead of time. Please leave your classroom clean and neat. If you need one of the classrooms for group work or a meeting, please check with your course coordinator or reception to reserve the space.

### **Auditorium**

The auditorium is reserved for large group presentations, forums, and lectures. Check with your course coordinator if you would like to use the auditorium.

### **Campbell Library**

Thanks to the support of John and Doris Campbell, who were among the founding Quaker families in Monteverde, and other members of the Campbell family, the Campbell library was completed in 2002. The goal of the library is to be an information resource for both the local community and international students and faculty, and to be a clearinghouse for research conducted in Monteverde. Toward this end, you will be asked to contribute electronic and hard copies of whatever research project you conduct during your course. Because of limited number of copies, not all books can be checked out. The librarian can provide you with more information.

Normal library hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm. During the months of June through mid-August, the library may have extended hours. Check with the librarian or your course coordinator for the schedule. A wealth of information on Monteverde is available through our digital library, which can be accessed [here](#).

### **Kitchen, Bathroom, and Other Facilities**

The kitchen is open for student and staff use. We ask that you wash everything you use for cooking and eating. There is a refrigerator designated for students. Friday is the official refrigerator cleaning day. Please take part in keeping the fridge clean by removing your old food (if not, the Friday cleanup will dispose of it). If you have food in the fridge on Friday that you want saved, please put a note on the container that says “No botar”.



There are several microwaves for you to use, at the back of the kitchen next to the glass doors. Please clean any splatters or spills. Remember that we all will be using the microwaves.

We ask that you take great care to sort and recycle your refuse by placing it in the appropriate container (various **recycling** and **compost** bins, and other **trash**, all labeled). Also, our bio-garden **gray water treatment system** does not function with organic matter. All organic scraps should be scraped into the appropriate compost buckets outside the kitchen. Kitchen drains are fitted with screens to catch food scraps. Please don't remove them, except to clean them out after use (by dumping them into the organic compost bucket). Like many homes and facilities in Costa Rica, only cold water comes out of the faucets at the Institute, (even when using the tap labeled "hot").

We ask that you dispose of **toilet paper** and other hygiene products in the wastebaskets, which are emptied throughout the day. While this will take some adjustment, it is the norm in Costa Rica. Most septic systems are not designed to quickly break down paper, and fibrous materials can cause unpleasant backups.

## Resources

### Audiovisual and other Equipment

MVI has LCD projectors, speakers, audio equipment, and a screen available for your use. To reserve any of these please check with your course coordinator or reception. If your course requires interviews, we suggest you bring your own voice recorder, as we do not have this equipment. MVI has simultaneous interpretation equipment for presentations, but this service requires advance notice for interpreter coordination.

### Postal Service

You may receive **mail** at MVI while participating in a course. Note that it can take up to three or more weeks for US mail to arrive in Monteverde. We suggest that you do not have large packages sent while you are here, as boxes are subject to random customs searches and may be held at the port. They must be retrieved personally, often with customs and storage fees. If a care package must be sent, a good rule of thumb is to send whatever can fit in an envelope package. MVI cannot return or forward mail that arrives after a student has left Monteverde. Please use the following format to receive mail:

**Your Name**

**Name of your program (e.g., *University of...*)**

**Instituto Monteverde**

**Apartado 69-61201**

**Monteverde de Puntarenas**

**Costa Rica**

Outgoing mail can be sent from the **Santa Elena post office (Correos)**, open weekdays from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. Mail sent from Costa Rica to the U.S or other countries may take from one to three weeks to arrive. Mail that is already stamped can be sent from MVI at reception or from several other locations in the zone (e.g. grocery stores); look for the blue *Correos* boxes.

### Computers, Internet, and Telecommunications

We recommend that you bring your own laptop if you will have assignments to complete while in Costa Rica. We highly encourage you to insure your laptop and to keep it secure at all times. The



Monteverde Institute will provide a locked storage area for computers, as well as lockers for participants in long courses. If you will be travelling, you might consider bringing a small padlock for lockers in shared lodging. Neither MVI nor your home institution will be responsible for theft or damage of your valuables. Check your study abroad office for more information on laptop insurance.

There is a **printer, a plotter, a photocopy machine**, and **two scanners** used by both students and staff. During peak hours there may be a wait time for your documents. To cut down on both backlog and paper use, we ask that you print only when necessary, and in black and white. Special exceptions can be made to print in color. Please ask your coordinator when you need documents printed or copied.

**Internet access** is available throughout the main building and on all Institute computers. Nevertheless, be prepared for cuts in service due to the weather, local overload of telecommunication lines, server problems, and power outages.

The Monteverde Institute has installed equipment to facilitate a high demand of internet use at the same time. However, please be considerate when using the internet as the bandwidth required for many popular sites will slow the system for everyone. Any use of social media is not permitted during classroom hours – please access these sites only before and after regular work hours (8:00am to 5:00pm) or at lunch (12:00pm to 1:00pm). Also, it is prohibited at all times to download items from YouTube, Netflix or similar sites, games, pornography, or live stream events.

## Phones

If you want to have use of a personal cell phone while in Costa Rica, these are your options:

- a. Your service provider may have international plans. Please check with them before your arrival. Inquire about calls, text service, and internet connections.
- b. You can purchase a Costa Rica SIM card at the airport or at service provider offices (ICE/Kolbi in Monteverde). A SIM card can be used in unlocked phones. Please check with your service provider before arriving in Costa Rica to make sure that your personal phone is unlocked if you wish to use it here with a SIM card.

**International calls** can also be made using calling cards. These cards can be purchased at stores and pharmacies throughout Costa Rica. You may receive emergency calls at the Institute (please check in reception for assistance); however, we ask that you do not call out on MVI phones.

## Bulletin boards

The white board in the reception area is used to post on-going events at the Institute. Events that are open to public and all students are invited. Located throughout the Institute are bulletin boards that provide information on local activities and nightlife, bus service, potential group outings, and other information that will help you connect to the Monteverde community. Please check them regularly, and feel free to post on them if you have information to share.

## MVI Campus and the Crandell Memorial Reserve

The MVI campus includes a green area, outdoor sitting areas (Pati's Memorial, the Fox Maple Court, the Fig Tree, and Sit with your Elders), flower and vegetable gardens, a tree nursery, a greenhouse, and trails. Secondary buildings include the Fox Maple building and the outdoor classroom.



In addition to the main campus, the Institute jointly owns and manages the 35-acre Rachel & Dwight Crandell Memorial Reserve. This reserve has several trails in a pre-montane ecosystem, and is made up of non-native pine stands, former pastureland, secondary growth forest, and primary forest at the higher elevations. Laminated trail maps are available at reception – please return them when you are done.

The land is available for field experiments, but you must first check with your course coordinator for approval.

### **Other opportunities at the Monteverde Institute**

Many students wish to return to Monteverde. Opportunities are often available and you can check out [our website](#) or email us at [info@mvinstitute.org](mailto:info@mvinstitute.org) for more information on the open courses we offer, research, internship, and volunteer opportunities.

We offer [Spanish Immersion courses](#), including homestays, as well as other open enrollment courses. Please check with your home institution regarding credit transfer before enrolling.

### **Monteverde Institute Center for Community Initiatives**

In addition to hosting study abroad courses, the MVI facilitates many community programs. Monteverde in Motion provides exercise classes to the local community and is one result of our study on food insecurity and obesity. Water resource management is studied through gray water treatment research in our bio-garden and rain gardens. We also run an Adopt-a-Stream project, which involves local high school students in ongoing monitoring of stream health in the Monteverde zone. The Campbell Library is an open-source digital library of Monteverde research and information as well as a physical collection, both in Spanish and English. The library also manages weather data from our weather station. Other projects at the MVI campus include sustainable land use development. We are exploring ways to create housing, interactive green space, trails, and other land uses that both respect and protect the natural environment.



## II. GENERAL INFORMATION ON COSTA RICA

The more you know about a country before you arrive, the more you will get out of your experience. There are many wonderful books on Costa Rica. At the very least, pick up a travel guide, or do an online search. If your Spanish is up to it, check out [La Nación](#), Costa Rica's largest circulating daily newspaper, [Amelia Rueda](#), and the [University of Costa Rica's newspaper](#). The [Tico Times](#) is the leading English-language news source.

### Country Background

Bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Caribbean on the east, Costa Rica is part of the land bridge that connects North and South America; its neighbors are Panama to the southeast and Nicaragua to the northwest (see Appendix IV). It is Central America's second-smallest nation. Costa Rica covers only 51,100 square km (about 32,000 square miles, or almost the size of South Carolina), but its geographic location and climatic conditions give rise to incredible diversity of ecosystems. The mountainous continental divide, the backbone of the Americas, runs the length of the country, dividing it into three general areas: The Pacific coastal plains, the Central Valley and the Caribbean coastal lowlands.

Translated from Spanish, Costa Rica means 'rich coast' – a name originating from rumors of vast gold treasures that never materialized. Spaniards explored and colonized the country throughout the 1500s, although it was not politically or economically important as a colony. Costa Rica achieved independence from Spain in 1821 by joining the Central American Federation, and in 1823 the capital was established in San José. The country's National Liberation movement abolished the Costa Rican army in 1948 and established a tradition of democratic elections and a free, democratic and independent republic. Costa Rica enjoys a stable government and has not suffered from the civil wars that have affected other Latin American countries.

This small country with its beautiful, mountainous landscape is often referred to as the 'Switzerland of Central America'. Costa Rica has a population of about 5.1 million people who call themselves *ticos* (or *ticas*). The population is largely made up of people of mixed European and indigenous origin, as well as a very small indigenous population. There is a sizeable black Creole population on the Atlantic coast. Nicaraguan immigrants, many of whom work in the agricultural sector, make up about 9% of the population of Costa Rica. The literacy rate in Costa Rica is 98%, the highest in Central America and among the highest in the world. The constitution guarantees universal public education, and elementary and high schools are found throughout the country in practically every community. The country also guarantees access to health care for all. Costa Rica has a strong sense of national pride in their educational, healthcare, and governmental accomplishments.



## Visa and Passport Requirements

(Visit [here](#) for the latest information)

**Passport:** All visitors to Costa Rica must have a valid passport. Passports must be valid through your return date to the US or Canada. For countries other than the US and Canada, passports must be valid for at six months from the date of your arrival in this country.

Carry a photocopy of your passport on your person, specifically the pages bearing your photo, passport number, and visa (entry stamp).

**Visa:** Citizens of the **United States, Canada, or the European Union** are usually given a 90-day tourist visa upon entry. **Please check your visa upon entrance and immediately advise your course coordinator if it is less than 90 days.** Citizens of **other countries** should check with their study abroad office or the Costa Rican consulate for 30-day visa requirements. Please notify the MVI as soon as possible for assistance if you will need a visa extension. The visa extension process may take as long as **six months**, so start the process early.

You are responsible for obtaining your passport and visa; MVI is not responsible for any delays related to visa or passport requirements. Please contact the MVI Academics office for advice and support ([academic@mvinstitute.org](mailto:academic@mvinstitute.org)). Nationals of some countries may have greater difficulty in obtaining a visa in a timely fashion. **Please check your visa duration as soon as you enter the country. Let your study abroad office and MVI know as soon as possible if your visa is shorter than the length of your course, as special arrangements will need to be made.**

**Proof of Departure:** You are required to have a ticket showing proof of onward travel from Costa Rica.

**Departure tax:** When you leave Costa Rica you might be required to pay a **\$29 exit tax** at the airport. Many airlines are now including the tax in the ticket price, so check if your ticket includes the tax. Cash (dollars and *colones*) and credit cards are accepted forms of payment. Exit tax when leaving Costa Rica by land is approximately \$29.

## US and Other Embassies

All embassies, including the US, are located in the capital city of San José. If your passport is lost or stolen, we recommend contacting the appropriate embassy for replacement. If you are national of a country other than the US, be sure to bring down contact information for your consulate.

Contact information for the US embassy is:

**Embajada de los Estados Unidos de América**

**Apartado 920-1200**

**Pavas, San José, Costa Rica**

**Tel: 2519-2000 / Consulate: (506) 2220-3939**

**Email: [info@usembassy.or.cr](mailto:info@usembassy.or.cr)**

**Fax: (506) 2232-7944**





## Telecommunications and cell phones

The country code for Costa Rica is 506, and phone numbers are eight digits. To call Costa Rica internationally, dial 011-506-XXXX-XXXX. To call the US from Costa Rica, dial 001 before the area code and number.

Most international calls can be made using a calling card, which can be purchased in pharmacies, grocery stores, and ICE offices. Internet cafés are scattered throughout the country, and Wi-Fi is widely available. The Monteverde Institute has both computers and wireless internet access for all students.

Your cell phone may work in Costa Rica, but be warned that **roaming fees** can be **very** expensive. Check with your service provider for international plans. If your cell phone is unlocked, you can obtain a pre-paid SIM card to use while in Costa Rica. These SIM cards can be purchased at the airport or once you arrive in Monteverde. Be sure to bring contact information for your provider in case your cell phone is lost or stolen.

## Time zone

Costa Rica is in the Central Standard Time Zone (UTC -6). There is no daylight savings time. Because of its proximity to the equator, the length of day is relatively consistent throughout the year, with sunrise around 6:00 am and sunset around 6:00 pm. We recommend carrying a flashlight in your backpack as it gets dark quickly.

## Electricity

Costa Rica uses the same 110 volts and plugs as the US. You do not need a converter if you are coming from the US.

## Currency, Weights, and Measurements

The national currency in Costa Rica is the *colón* (plural: *colones*). Current exchange rate is approximately \$500 colones to \$1US, but this is subject to change on a daily basis. US dollars are widely accepted in denominations under \$50. Do not convert all your money into *colones* upon entering Costa Rica. You can use your debit card to withdraw *colones*, change dollars, or spend dollars and get change in *colones*. Like most of the world, Costa Rica uses the metric system. Please see Appendix III for metric conversions. In Costa Rica there are a few exceptions to the metric measurements. For example, land may be measured by *hectáreas* (hectares are 2.49 acres) or *manzanas* (1.72 acres), and many construction measurements are in inches.

## Holidays

Please be aware that national holidays will affect business hours for state institutions, schools, banks, consulates, etc. Some stores and business will be closed as well. Although not as common as in the US, the actual date of celebration may change to accommodate the workweek.

Costa Rica's holidays reflect the predominance of Catholicism. Holy Week, which is the week prior to Easter Sunday, is a major holiday. Many offices will be closed from Thursday to Sunday, and most commercial establishments will be closed on Good Friday (**viernes santo**). Costa Ricans traditionally head to the beaches during this time, so expect the roads and beaches to be crowded. Public transportation may be unavailable on *viernes santo*.

The week of Christmas until New Years is also a major holiday time. Many businesses close for a two-week period.

**Official holidays include:**

January 1: Año nuevo (New Year's Day)  
April 11: Día de Juan Santa María (Juan Santa Maria Day)  
Holy Week: Jueves y viernes santo, Pascua (Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter)  
May 1: Día de los trabajadores (International Labor Day)  
July 25: Anexión del Partido de Nicoya (Annexation of Nicoya)  
August 2: Día de la Virgen de los Ángeles  
August 15: Día de la madre (Mother's Day)  
September 15: Día de independencia (Independence Day)  
December 1: Abolición del Ejército (Abolition of the Army)  
December 25: Navidad (Christmas)

**Shopping**

Many items are readily available in Costa Rica, from souvenirs to OTC medicines to rubber boots. San José even has large shopping malls complete with well-known international shops and movie theaters. Smaller towns often have well-stocked grocery stores. Some imported items can be just as expensive as in your home country so be sure to look at the prices.

You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage, so think before you buy that large piece of pottery. Some places offer to ship merchandise anywhere in the world if you don't want to carry it back.

When you buy snacks or other convenience items, consider buying national or Latin American brands before buying the familiar imported US items. They will likely be less expensive, and will give you a different flavor and perspective, and more of your money will stay in the local economy.

**In case of political or social unrest**

According to the U.S. Embassy, if you find yourself in situations of political or social unrest, you should consider the following preventative measures:

- Avoid demonstrations.
- Shelter in place if your surrounding area is affected by demonstrations or move to a safer location if your current location is unsafe.
- If you feel unsafe, consider arrangements to depart the country.
- Use caution when walking or driving at night.
- Keep a low profile.
- Do not display signs of wealth such as expensive watches or jewelry.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Enroll in the U.S. Embassy's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive Alerts and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Follow the Department of State on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Review the [Crime and Safety Report](#) for the country

U.S. citizens who travel abroad should always have a contingency plan for emergency situations.

Review the [Travelers Checklist](#) prepared by the U.S. State Department



### III. ABOUT THE MONTEVERDE ZONE

#### General Background

Monteverde is located in the highlands of northwestern Costa Rica, and is reached by 32 km winding, paved road off the Pan-American Highway (see Appendix II). To the west are Pacific-facing slopes and the Nicoya Peninsula, which are seasonally dry. The crest of the mountainous ridge just above Monteverde, known as the continental divide, sits at approximately 1,400 m above sea level, and is blanketed by a cool, wet cloud forest. Verdant wet forest extends from this crest down to the Atlantic lowlands, providing a striking contrast to the drier Pacific slope. This unique situation of contrasting wet and dry forest presents an extraordinary opportunity to study plant-animal interactions, ecology, and natural history. Monteverde is world-famous for creating the Monteverde Reserve complex, a collection of private preserves protecting more than 29,000 ha of endangered tropical forest. Monteverde is not a national park; the large expanse of protected areas is the result of grassroots efforts by local residents, biologists, and concerned groups and citizens throughout the world. The largest reserves are the *Bosque Eterno de los Niños* (Children's Eternal Rainforest), managed by the Monteverde Conservation League, and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, managed by the Tropical Science Center. Many private landowners, businesses, and local institutions also have forest set aside for conservation, making Monteverde home to the largest private cloud forest reserve system in Central America.

Depending on the context, the name Monteverde can mean different things. In general, it refers to the Monteverde Zone, a rough geographical area that encompasses approximately 14 communities. Historically these were dairy farming communities, but now they have economies based on ecotourism, dairy, and coffee production. The population of the Zone is close to 7,000, with the greatest concentration of people in the village of Santa Elena, followed by the villages of Cerro Plano and Monteverde.

Monteverde also refers to the original Monteverde village founded by seven Quaker families in 1951. After four Quaker men were jailed for refusing to register for the US draft, these Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends, came to Costa Rica, in search of a place where they could live in accordance with their pacifist beliefs without persecution. Costa Rica had abolished its military a few years prior to the Quakers' arrival. Today the village of Monteverde has several hundred residents, and still maintains a strong Quaker/US influence. The Monteverde Friends School and Meeting House is an important center for this community.

Finally, Monte Verde (two words) refers to Municipal District 9 of the Province of Puntarenas, a relatively new distinction. The first municipal government of Monte Verde was elected in 2003; prior to this Monteverde was largely self-governed.

Due to its natural beauty and unique history, Monteverde is a prime ecotourism destination, drawing approximately 250,000 visitors a year. This represents almost a quarter of all the tourists who visit Costa Rica. Much of this growth has occurred in the last fifteen years, and Monteverde is grappling with the rapid, dramatic shift from a sleepy, dairy zone to one dependent on and bustling with tourism. This has brought tremendous economic growth and development; at the same time, Monteverde must figure out how to make ecotourism and development co-exist with fragile, primary cloud forest.



## Life in Monteverde: What to Expect

For visitors to Monteverde, life here can be a joy as well as a challenge. If you arrive well prepared, both mentally and physically, you will gain the most from your Monteverde experience. First, the road up to Monteverde from the Pan-American Highway is now paved. In town, there is only a paved road, with few sidewalks, the secondary roads are not paved, there may be mud and dust so be prepared to walk on stony dirt roads and trails. The roads are shared by people, vehicles, and horses. During the dry season vehicles can kick up dust; during the rainy season be prepared to be splashed by mud.

There are three seasons in Monteverde. The dry season, from mid-January to mid-May, is characterized by sunny days with the possibility of wind and mist. The rainy season, from May to October, can be very wet and muddy, especially in the afternoons, while the mornings are generally clear and sunny. The transition season (November to February) is marked by strong winds, light rains, and mist. Nights can feel very cool (due to high humidity) and the daytime temperature is moderate all year round. If you are coming in the rainy season, be sure to bring wet weather gear (waterproof jackets and pants, umbrellas, and if you can, rubber boots). Rubber boots are a common item and are available for purchase in Santa Elena. Flip-flops or slippers are often worn indoors, as most people do not wear their shoes inside their homes due to the mud or dust. During the rainy season it is hard to dry clothes, and things tend to mold quickly. Bring cases and covers for valuable equipment such as cameras and computers. Clothes that dry quickly such as synthetic fabrics, silk, and wool are better than cotton. As you travel down the mountain to other parts of the country, temperatures are very hot and humid, and your clothing needs will be different.

The great biodiversity of the region includes a wide assortment of insects. Fortunately, we do not have swarms of biting insects and most are not harmful. However, you may consider bringing a mosquito net to hang over your bed at night. You are likely to encounter insects such as moths, beetles, bees, caterpillars, and mosquitoes, as well as non-insect arthropods such as scorpions, ticks, and spiders. Unless you are allergic, the bites or stings of these creatures are generally not life-threatening. They may be painful or cause irritation, for which anti-itch cream or ice is helpful. Monteverde ticks are not known to carry diseases and the scorpions are not deadly. Zika, dengue, Chikungunya, yellow fever, and malaria have not been contracted to date in Monteverde. There is a low presence of assassin or Chagas bugs.

The diversity of Monteverde includes cultural diversity. Our community is comprised of farmers, business owners and managers, politicians, health care workers, educators, biologists, and tourism operators. Cultures include Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, North American, Argentinian, Chilean, French, German, and Israeli. Many children share cultures within their family.

## Clinics, Banks, Shopping, and Other Facilities

Santa Elena (3km from MVI) has a public health clinic (known as *la clínica*), which provides basic treatments and minor surgery but is mainly focused on preventative care. There are two private emergency clinics (and a third scheduled to open soon) whose services are covered by most insurance carriers. All are within a 10-minute drive of the Monteverde Institute. The nearest hospital is in Puntarenas, which is a 2-hour drive from Monteverde. Other hospitals that are fully equipped for emergencies are located in San José (2½ - 4 hours by car from Monteverde) and Liberia (3 hours by car from Monteverde).



The Monteverde zone has three full-service banks: The *Banco Nacional* and *Banco Popular* in Santa Elena and the *Banco de Costa Rica* (BCR) in Cerro Plano. All have ATMs (*cajero automático*). Banks can change dollars and can also provide you with a cash advance on a Visa or MasterCard (check on applicable fees). You must bring your passport to the bank, and be prepared to take a number for a long wait. You can withdraw *colones*, the Costa Rican currency, from ATMs. Notify your bank of your travel plans to avoid having your credit or debit card blocked as a security measure in response to charges registered in a foreign country. Most stores and restaurants in Monteverde accept US dollars and debit/credit cards. Expect to get your change back in *colones* – an easy way to change money. We suggest that you bring some cash with you, preferably small bills (fives and tens). Fifty dollars in small bills should get you through your first days, if not longer.

Aside from the many souvenir shops, Monteverde has several grocery stores that cater to locals and visitors. The largest are in Santa Elena. There are several pharmacies, hardware stores, and general merchandise stores that cater more to locals. Because of the volume of tourists and the number of foreigners living in the zone, you can now purchase a lot of things in Monteverde, including insect repellent, shampoo, sunscreen, batteries, cameras, etc. Note that these items may be more expensive than you would pay in your home country. Sunscreen is one item that is considerably more expensive in Costa Rica.

There is a police office, the station is located out of town in the *Sunset Hotel*. The telephone numbers will be provided to you upon arrival. The post office (*Correos*) is located on the hill as you head out of Santa Elena on the road to Monteverde (open 8:00am to 4:30pm). There are many good restaurants in the area offering typical Costa Rican food as well as pizza, *nuevo latino* cuisine, sandwiches, and fried chicken. Many cater to tourists so check the prices before you order – they can be expensive. You might also want to try the ice cream and cheese from the famous Monteverde Cheese Factory, next to MVI, as well as delicious local coffee.

### Activities in Monteverde

The best way to know what's going on is to check out the MVI **bulletin boards** and **"like" us on Facebook** – we regularly post community activities.

Despite its isolation and small size, there are many activities going on in Monteverde, a reflection of the dynamic multicultural population and active civic engagement. Many talented musicians live in Monteverde, and Costa Rican groups frequently come up the mountain to play in local clubs and community centers. Monteverde is home to many artists who draw their inspiration from the natural environment. You can see their works in the galleries located throughout the area.

One of the best activities is to take a hike – it's the beauty of Monteverde that put it on the map. Be sure to visit at least one of the reserves while you are here. **The Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve** is the most famous, and is located approximately 3km from MVI. The **Santa Elena Reserve** is run by the local public high school. **The Children's Eternal Rainforest (*Bosque Eterno de los Niños*)** is run by the Monteverde Conservation League. In addition, there are several other small private reserves with their own trails and tours, including the MVI Crandell Reserve.

For those over age 18, there are a couple of bars and discos, mainly in Santa Elena. If you decide to visit them, we ask that you **exercise caution**: go with friends, use moderation, be respectful, and don't leave alone.



### Stray and wild animals

First, do not feed wild animals or get too close. Behavior and diseases are unpredictable. Second, stray dogs and cats are abundant in this region. Dogs are very perceptive regarding tourists' fondness for animals and it is not unusual to have a stray (or several) follow you around. Please do not allow these animals to follow you to the Institute. Third, most homestay families will not appreciate an animal at the house. Pets are not usually "part of the family." Remember the conducive nature of tropical environments for population explosions of ticks, fleas, and other potentially disease-transmitting insects.

### Getting around Monteverde

Monteverde is a "One Road Town" (Appendix II). The main highway passes through Santa Elena, the business district, and the villages of Cerro Plano and Monteverde. It ends at the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. The section from Santa Elena to the MVI campus is approximately 3km (less than 2 miles) and it usually takes ½ hour to walk.

The road is shared by cars, tour buses, taxis, motorcycles, ATVs, horses, and pedestrians, including children walking home from school. The sidewalk system is not complete. **There is no pedestrian right of way in Costa Rica, so walk defensively. Carry a flashlight as a beacon when walking at night.**

**Local public bus service**, known as the *periférica*, is available throughout the zone. See the MVI bulletin boards for the current bus schedule from Santa Elena to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. There is bus service available to San José and other parts of the country. Check the bus depot, located at the Plaza Monteverde shopping center, for more information. Private mini-van service, such as Interbus, offers an alternative to the public buses to for getting around the country, but costs about 10 times as much.

**Taxi service** is widely available from 5:00am to 10:00pm. The price can run from \$5 to \$15 a ride depending on the hour and distance, but can be shared among multiple passengers. Special arrangements can also be made for a taxi outside of normal hours or for private transportation to places outside of Monteverde. This can be quite expensive.

You can also just walk the roads to get from one place to another – most people do. If you intend to be out after dark be sure to bring a flashlight, and we recommend walking with others.





#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDYING ABROAD

Studying abroad can be a rewarding and life-changing experience. Research has shown that studying abroad enhances one's career, academic performance, retention, and personal development. Remarkable findings show that study [abroad](#) students tend to have higher salaries, GPA's, acceptance to their preferred graduate schools, and overall satisfaction with career selection and skills. It is a continuation of your educational journey in a different place, culture, and context, which provides an opportunity to develop adaptability, problem-solving and communication skills, as well an expanded worldview.

Culture consists of beliefs, traditions, behavior, and norms, as well as diet, language, smells, sights, and sounds. To make the most of your experience, we strongly encourage you to fully experience all of these components. There are many subtleties that you will learn through your senses. At times, you may feel overwhelmed with all of the differences in your life. We will have culture shock sessions to assist your transition if you are here for an extended period of time. We support your efforts to experience this culture fully.

Here are some tips for a smooth adjustment to life in Costa Rica:

**Be Culturally Sensitive:** Effective cultural exchange happens when our preconceived notions are challenged, allowing for appreciation of other cultural viewpoints. Understanding a culture requires respect and withholding judgment.

**Maintain Self-Awareness:** The idea of "letting go" when you go abroad is an area of tourism research, and has been dubbed "swimming in a different sea." You should practice the same level of awareness and caution that you would back home. While Costa Rica is a very safe country, you should not lower your guard.

As a guest in Costa Rica, please be aware and respectful of the social norms. Your actions will leave behind a legacy. We encourage you, as a representative of your family, the Monteverde Institute, your sending institution, and your home country, to make your impact a positive one.

If you are in a homestay, you will receive several workshops on culture and customs. Be observant as well in order to pick up nuances regarding speech, dress, and mannerisms.

**Be Flexible:** Be flexible as the bus may be late, the food you are served may taste different (even if it has the same name), the electricity or water may go out, or the itinerary may change. Adaptability is a great life skill, and approaching ambiguity with a sense of humor and ease will set the stage for a more rewarding study abroad experience.

**Stay Tuned in:** This is your opportunity to experience Costa Rican culture. While cultural immersion can be overwhelming at times, we strongly recommend that you do not retreat to your known world through electronic devices. Stay in the present, experience where you are, and spend time with those around you.



## Norms and Practices in Costa Rica

Remember: Understanding social norms is necessary for acting respectfully in your host culture. The best way to achieve this understanding is by observing and asking questions. Here are some useful tips to get you on the right path...

### Language

Most activities in your program will be developed in English or will include interpretation. Most programs do not require prior knowledge of Spanish, and most include Spanish language instruction at the Monteverde Institute. For certain specialized courses or internships, Spanish may be required and will be clearly specified.

To make the most of your visit, communication in Spanish is very important. Learning key phrases before your arrival is conducive to a smooth entry into your host culture. Asserting yourself by speaking as much Spanish as possible enriches your experience. Attempting to communicate in Spanish is appreciated and mistakes are not ridiculed. If someone speaks too fast, you can say “*más despacio, por favor*” (“more slowly, please”). If you would like your Spanish to be corrected, you must insist. There are many slangs or vernacular phrases used in Costa Rica and one of the most common is *pura vida*. While the literal translation is “pure life,” the intention is to denote something that is really great or “cool” – it can be used to describe an experience, a person, as a salutation, or even to cap off a sentence.

### Greetings

Upon arrival to a gathering, it is expected to greet everyone with a hello, handshake, or kiss on the cheek (between women, and men and women). Touching another’s arm in greeting is also customary. Between men, handshakes are the norm. When leaving, you are expected to say goodbye to everyone. Common phrases for greetings are *buenos días*, *buenas tardes*, or *buenas noches* depending upon time of day.

### Food

Rice and beans are dietary staples in Costa Rica. Meals tend to be high in carbohydrates and low in animal protein. Tropical fruit and vegetables are plentiful and varied. Breakfast foods include *gallo pinto* (rice and beans fried up together), fresh fruit, pancakes, tortillas, eggs, toast, and coffee. Lunches packed by your homestay family may be a typical *casado*, which includes rice, beans, some meat, vegetable, and salad. Dinner may be similar.

Some of the best drinks are the *frescos naturales*, or natural fruit drinks. These are common accompaniments to a *casado*. Most are made with fresh tropical fruits, many of which are unavailable in other temperate regions, such as *guanábana*, *maracuyá*, *cas*, *mango*, *piña*, and *carambola*.

While vegetarians can be easily accommodated, more restricted diets – such as a vegan diet – can be harder to manage. Alert MVI and your host family of dietary restrictions.

Diets are an important component of a culture and this is a great opportunity to expand your horizons. Bringing your own snacks like granola bars or other specialty items is recommended if you might miss something in particular or are accustomed to snacking between meals. Snack foods are also available for purchase at the local stores.

***¡Buen provecho!***



## Clothing

Dress in Costa Rica is very similar to the US and Canada: jeans, jersey tops, sneakers, sandals, and light jackets. We recommend field pants and clothing made of materials that dry quickly. Rain gear is very important; umbrellas are commonly used, as are rubber boots. Dirty or torn clothing is not the norm in Costa Rica. Shorts and short dresses tend to be used at beach areas but are not common in Monteverde. Shoes tend to be kept remarkably clean. If shoes are muddy, take them off before you go inside someone's home. Make sure to bring a pair of flip-flops or other slip-ons for indoor use. If you are in a homestay, remember that your clothing will be washed by your host family.

## Personal Electronic Devices

Please limit your use of personal electronic devices and do not use them in classes, activities, hikes, or while eating dinner with your family. Do not use your headphones while walking on the streets as pedestrians do not have the right of way. Being able to hear on-coming traffic will help avoid accidents. To make the most of your time while you are here, we recommend that you set a personal limit for electronic device use.

## Personal Hygiene and Bathroom Etiquette

Personal cleanliness is important in Costa Rica. The warm, wet climate of the tropics is conducive to growth of bacteria and fungi, and infections can develop quite quickly. Good hygiene is important to stay healthy. It is also respectful to practice good personal hygiene and wear clean clothing, as is customary in Costa Rica.

Most homes and offices only have cold water out of the tap. In many homes, **warm showers** are provided by a *termoducha*, an electrical heating showerhead. This device works best with a moderate flow of water. **Do not touch the unit or any wires, do not attempt to adjust it.** If you have any concerns about the showerhead (e.g. questionable wires), please inform your homestay family and MVI.

**Used toilet paper** is generally disposed of in wastebaskets unless otherwise indicated. Likewise, do not throw feminine hygiene products, especially "flushable" tampons, in the toilet, as they will likely clog the system. This is true in virtually all of Latin America and a good habit to learn if you intend to travel elsewhere.

## Gift-giving

If you are in a homestay and would like to bring gifts, here are some suggestions:

- Small souvenirs (pens, flashlights, notebooks, stickers, magnets, key chains, etc.) with your state, town, or school logo
- Items that share some of your home culture with your host family
- Chocolates or food items from your region
- School supplies: markers, play dough, crayons, paper
- Stuffed animals
- Small building kits like Legos
- Story books and coloring books (in Spanish)
- Games such as dominoes that don't require much English



- Bead kits, model kits, or other lightweight craft kits
- Perfume, cologne, make-up, hand creams or other special toiletries
- Hair accessories, jewelry
- T-shirts, socks
- Swiss army knives or small tool kits (packed in your checked luggage)
- Kitchen utensils
- Ornaments for the home, towels

### Culture Shock

**Culture shock** is a normal part of cultural immersion and adjustment to a new environment. After an initial honeymoon period, when everything is exciting and new, feeling overwhelmed and/or homesick is common. The degree and duration of culture shock varies from person to person.

What can you do? Know that **you can get through it**. This adjustment period usually passes rather quickly. Remember that everything in your life just changed and it is normal to feel overwhelmed. Give yourself some time to process your feelings. Keeping a journal can be helpful, as can talking to others about how you feel. The MVI will provide opportunities to talk about this with other students and an advisor. This is usually helpful and it can be a relief to hear that someone else is going through the same thing.

Get enough rest. Lack of sleep and fatigue have a big influence on your overall well-being. It is common during courses to push yourself mentally and physically –some down time for your body and spirit can work wonders.

Always feel free to talk to your professor, course coordinator, or homestay coordinator

### Suggested Packing List

Although Monteverde is said to have a wet (May through December) and dry season (January through April), it can be rainy, misty and cool any time of the year. If your course includes traveling to other parts of the country, you will also experience hot, humid weather. We suggest you bring lightweight, easy-drying clothing that can be layered for a **wide range of weather conditions**. **Also, clothes will get dirty much quicker in the tropics. Please bring sufficient tops and socks.**

### Short Courses (3 weeks or less)

We recommend only bringing what you are comfortable carrying on your own. An internal framed backpack or duffle, and a small hand carry, should be fine. Do not over pack as you will want room for items you purchase while in Costa Rica.

**Note:** See list of documents to carry on your person and pre-departure to do list at the beginning of this handbook. **Put your name on everything: clothing, notebooks, backpack, etc.**

**Clothes:**

- Long and short sleeved shirts
- 2-3 pairs pants (light cotton, nylon or quick-dry – denim can be uncomfortable at high humidity)
- 1 or 2 pairs of shorts
- Socks, including some heavier ones for hiking
- Underwear (at least one week's worth)
- 1 or 2 sweatshirts or a light jacket – it can be cool and damp. A fleece jacket combined with a wind-breaker is fine
- Sneakers, running shoes or comfortable walking shoes
- Hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes with ankle support (waterproof recommended; rubber boots, necessary at times of heavy rain, can be purchased in Costa Rica for about \$15.00). Break them in before you come.
- Bathing suit, beach towel or sarong, and water shoes (optional; such as Tevas or Reefs)
- Flip flops or sandals for using indoors
- Rain gear: sturdy poncho or raincoat (umbrellas are very useful)
- Hat (optional)
- A set of nice but casual clothes to wear in the evenings, to community events and in San José

**Other:**

- Flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries
- Water bottle
- Notebook (consider waterproof paper such as Rite-in-the-Rain)
- Any prescription or other medications you may need, along with a copy of the prescription and in the original bottles. If you have anaphylactic allergy, bring your Epi-pen as they are not available in Costa Rica. If you have asthma, bring your inhaler.
- Preferred OTC medication brands (e.g. Benadryl, Tylenol, contraception). Many popular brands are available in Costa Rica but may be difficult to find or expensive.
- Personal toiletries for at least a 2-week period (shampoo, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, tampons, brush, etc.)
- Extra eyeglasses, contact lenses, contact lens solution (it is available in Costa Rica)
- Towel/sarong
- Sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher
- Travel clock or watch with alarm (phone can be used)
- Day pack with rain-cover large enough for lunch, water bottle, rain gear, extra layer of clothing, camera, notebooks.
- Basic first aid kit (band aids, antiseptic ointment, Benadryl cream, Pepto-Bismol tablets, etc.)
- Copy of passport (in plastic bag)
- \$29 for airport exit tax
- Spending money
- Plastic bags (at least 2 garbage sized bags to line your pack or carry wet clothes; several gallon sized zip lock bags for electronics or other items that should not get wet)

**Optional (but recommended) items:**

- Camera
- Binoculars
- Umbrella
- Earplugs (for noisy hotels)
- Padlock
- Money belt or neck wallet
- Swiss army knife (only in checked baggage, not in your carry-on)
- Costa Rica field guides
- Tissue packets
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Preferred snacks (e.g. granola bars, energy bars)
- Cell phone and charger (if you plan to use it)
- Insect repellent and anti-itch cream (if you're particularly sensitive to insect bites)

**Additional packing suggestions:**

- Do not bring expensive jewelry that you are afraid to lose.
- Insure your personal belongings, especially a laptop if you bring one.
- Bring clothing that is versatile and interchangeable: a pair of lightweight khakis can be used for hiking or dressed up if you are going out.

**Semester Courses**

In addition to the items listed on the above packing list for short courses, please bring the following:

- Preferred clothing (e.g. jeans, shirts, skirts, etc.) in addition to the field clothes mentioned above
- An additional pair of shoes and/or sandals
- Yoga mat/camping mat (on which to sleep) (midterm field trip)
- Sleeping bag (midterm field trip)
- Pillow case (stuff with clothes for pillow) (midterm field trip)
- Preferred personal toiletries (shampoo, soap, toothbrush, tampons, etc.). If you use specific brands, consider bringing enough for the duration of the course.
- Insect repellent
- Flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries if they are not AA or AAA
- Day pack with rain-cover large enough for lunch, water bottle, rain gear, extra layer of clothing, camera, notebooks
- Laptop (recommended) and charger
- School supplies





## **V. PLACE-BASED ACADEMICS**

The Institute's programs are based on the belief that to achieve sustainability — both locally and globally — a combination of environmental, social, cultural, economic, and technological factors must be carefully considered. To that end, MVI fosters a synergistic approach that blends international study abroad, applied research, and community engagement. Our programs focus on sustainable development, ecotourism, Spanish language, Costa Rican culture, conservation biology, community health, education, land use planning, natural resource management, and social justice.

Understanding the globalization phenomenon of this century is another tenet of the programs directed by the Monteverde Institute. Given the mobilization of goods, services, and people, accelerated by electronic communications, students need to recognize the importance of being global citizens and stewards.

The MVI courses incorporate unique experiences in spectacular settings, such as canopy climbing in a tropical cloud forest. Our goal, however, is to present current issues and studies in a manner that will impact your world vision and empower you to effect positive change. A course with MVI is not just academic learning, nor a vacation; it is a life-changing experience.

### **Course Coordination**

Every MVI course is accompanied by a course coordinator and, in many cases, a professor (either from MVI or the sending institution). The coordinator plays a very important role in logistics, information, general well-being of the group and individuals, and smooth operations. The professor's main role is instruction and student assistance. These people take their responsibilities very seriously and we ask that you do the same. Please respect their expertise and concern for your well-being by following their directives and listening to their directives and advice. Please maintain open communication with them and alert them to any situation that could affect a student or the group.

### **Specific to semester-long courses**

The Monteverde Institute is pleased to welcome you to your semester program. The semester long course is a rigorous academic program that incorporates experiential learning and community initiatives. Three components are always included: place-based learning, research, and community involvement. The credit-bearing components of this experience are designed to challenge your knowledge base while providing an interdisciplinary academic experience, project implementation, and cultural exchange.

We would like to present a few of the specific details regarding a successful completion of your semester program:

- While the Monteverde Institute will be your campus, you are in a place-based education program. You will be surrounded by your topics of study in their natural settings. Take advantage of the fact that you will be in the forest while you study tropical ecology, in a country with socialized medicine while studying public health issues, and in 6" downpours while designing water run-off solutions.
- Cultural immersion is a key part of your study abroad.



- Please know and comply with your sending institution's requirements regarding credits, travel, conduct, and communication.
- You will have greater access to your professors while in Monteverde than at home. Please take advantage of this opportunity while respecting professors' time.
- Professors determine course rules and requirements. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with these at the start of the semester.
- Time management is crucial. Finding a balance between new experiences and social and academic activities is a challenge. Planning for major projects, papers, and exams will be very important.
- Please note when there are mandatory weekend activities.
- Please honor the professor's expectations regarding the classroom environment and course outcomes. Electronic devices are not permitted unless the professor gives explicit permission.
- Repeated tardiness, unexcused absences, and general lack of participation are not acceptable.
- The course coordinator will have weekly, mandatory meetings with the students. Faculty are welcome to participate in these meetings. The purpose of the meetings will be to discuss logistics and schedules, as well as address concerns and questions. This is the appropriate time to bring up pertinent topics.
- The Monteverde Institute welcomes you to the facilities. Please make yourself at home but we ask that you be considerate of other students, faculty, visitors, and staff. We appreciate your awareness of noise levels, internet use, and kitchen cleanliness.
- Get to know the staff. One of the perks of working at the Institute is meeting other students. We hope that you enjoy meeting the staff as well.
- We do not encourage animals on campus. Please do not ask your course coordinator to care for any domestic animals. If you are interested in animal welfare, check out the local organization [Amor Animal Monteverde](#).
- Concerns should be expressed to your course coordinator, academic director, or professor. Official complaints must be filed in writing to either the course coordinator, academic director, program director, or the MVI executive director. Your complaint must be addressed within 5 working days.



## **MVI Student Code of Conduct**

Our goal at the Monteverde Institute is to provide you with a quality educational experience. To make the most of your time here, we take every precaution to guarantee your health, safety and general well-being.

At the same time, you play the greatest role in determining the quality of your experience in Costa Rica. Your individual actions and behavior can have an enormous positive (or negative) impact on your and the entire group's experience.

As international students, you are highly visible guests in this small community and your actions are noticed and remembered. As you talk with residents, they will remark about the pleasure of hosting a certain student or remember the help of students in the construction of the meeting house. We invite you to continue this legacy of mutually beneficial interactions between students and the Monteverde community.

Due to the intensive nature and unique environment of our courses, full participation, cooperation, and teamwork are necessary requirements. Help your fellow students, watch out for each other, and promote positive relationships and collaboration within the team of which you are a part.

As an MVI student, you are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, and participate in all program activities, field trips, and excursions. You are expected to be respectful of all persons including other students, professors, MVI staff, homestay families, and people you meet while you are here. We expect you to conduct yourself in a manner appropriate to your status as a guest of Costa Rica and as a representative of your home university, home country, and MVI.

## **Violations of Costa Rican Law**

Any violation of Costa Rican law is automatically considered misconduct and grounds for immediate suspension from the MVI program. In the specific example of illegal drug possession and/or use, including marijuana, drug laws and penalties are strict in Costa Rica. A single conviction could carry a 6 to 12-year prison sentence. Guilt by association may also be hard to disprove. MVI cannot and will not protect you from being prosecuted. Anyone found using or in possession of illegal drugs will be sent home immediately at his or her own expense.

Other illegal actions include sexual assault, sexual contact with minors, physical assault, alcohol consumption by minors, theft, vandalism, public nudity, and extraction of natural materials (animals, plants, shells, rocks, etc.). Smoking in public is very restricted; please be aware that smoking is only allowed in designated areas. It is your responsibility to understand the laws of Costa Rica. Review these sources: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#).

Please respect Costa Rican standards and norms. Public nudity, public displays of affection, drunken or boisterous behavior, rudeness, and dirty appearance are frowned upon. Nudity on beaches, no matter how apparently deserted, is not permissible. Courteous behavior, appropriate dress, and personal hygiene are appreciated.

Finally, please note MVI's policy on vehicle use. For safety and liability reasons (and in some cases Costa Rican law) students are not allowed to drive or ride on a motorcycle or all-terrain vehicle, regardless of age. In addition, students may not drive a vehicle for the duration of a course.



## Misconduct

Students must abide by both Monteverde Institute policies and Costa Rican law. Please remember that you are in a foreign country. In addition to suspension from the Monteverde Institute program, legal violations are handled by Costa Rican authorities and the Monteverde Institute does not have the obligation nor means to protect you from being prosecuted.

The following are considered misconduct and are subject to appropriate action.

1. **Violation of Costa Rican law**, including:
  - a) Consumption and/or possession of illegal drugs.
  - b) Alcohol consumption by persons under 18 years old.
  - c) Providing alcohol to minors.
  - d) Sexual harassment, abuse, or assault of any type, and sexual contact with a minor. Sexual assault is a felony in Costa Rica and is defined as physical contact of a sexual nature without one's will or consent. This includes rape and unacceptable physical contact. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct or written communication of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive sexual nature. Certain forms of harassment are considered assault and are, therefore, a felony.
  - e) Theft and vandalism.
  - f) Carrying firearms without permit.

## Violations of Monteverde Institute policies:

- a) Smoking or alcohol consumption on the MVI premises at any time. MVI is a smoke- and alcohol-free environment.
- b) Excessive drinking by students over age 18. Excessive drinking is defined as having a negative impact on student academic performance, on group dynamics, or on the community.
- c) Driving a motorized vehicle at any time during the course.
- d) Riding on a motorcycle or ATV.
- e) Willful obstruction or disruption of any MVI course teaching, organized activity, study, research, examination, meeting, or ceremony.
- f) Willful damage, misuse, theft, or misappropriation of private or public property.
- g) Abusive, threatening, lewd, or obscene behavior.
- h) Bringing anyone to your place of lodging who is not staying there without permission from your professor, the course coordinator, and the lodging administration.
- i) Abusive, threatening, lewd, or obscene behavior.
- j) Repeated tardiness to and/or unexcused absences from classes and activities.
- k) Travel outside of the program's designated location (and/or leaving the program) without the proper approval and fulfillment of the program sign out requirements.
- l) Failure to abide by the homestay rules including repeated late night returns and/or not returning to your homestay without notification, disrespectful behavior, and providing inappropriate items to family members.



- m) Discrimination or harassment against any person based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, political conviction, religious belief, disability, or physical or medical condition.

## Discipline

In the case of minor infractions, or in the event that any individual's behavior is creating difficulties for other individuals, the group, MVI, the host family, or the community, the person(s) involved will be asked to meet with the MVI course coordinator, homestay coordinator (if involving homestay), and the course leader(s) or academic director to discuss the situation. Generally, a mutually agreed-upon resolution can be reached in this way.

If the misconduct is more serious in nature, or if a formal complaint is received from another student, course leader, professor, the MVI course coordinator, host family, or a community member, MVI reserves the right to convene a Board of Discipline. The Board will be made up of the following persons:

1. MVI Executive director,
2. A professor / teacher / leader of the home institution,
3. MVI course coordinator or professor, and
4. The MVI homestay coordinator, if applicable.

The Board will review the complaint, discuss the situation, and verify whether there is misconduct. If proven, the Board may take any of the following actions:

1. Warning,
2. Suspension of the student's participation in planned activities, or
3. Limited suspension of the student's participation from the course and notification to the sending institution, or
4. Expulsion from the program, notification of home university and return to home country at student's own expense.

Should the resolution require removal from a homestay and placement with a different host family or alternative lodging, the student or home institution will be responsible for paying the remaining balance of homestay to the family, plus the additional cost of new accommodations. Many families depend on the income generated by hosting students, and it is unfair that they lose income due to student's behavior.

In the case of illegal actions, the student will be immediately suspended from the program and is personally responsible for their actions and return travel costs.

By being respectful, using good judgment, and being a thoughtful member of your group, your time here will be fulfilling and rewarding. This code of conduct is designed to ensure your safety and enhance your experience. Most of this is common sense and we have found that most students follow these rules naturally. We have had many years of successful programs due to this attitude of international study students. **We wish you an exciting, educational, and safe experience!**



## VI. HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Monteverde Institute wants you to have a healthy, safe experience in Costa Rica. The following information is provided to help minimize your risk of personal harm and illness. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

### Medical needs, health insurance coverage, medications, and pre-existing conditions

Reliable medical services are available throughout Costa Rica. Santa Elena (3km from MVI) has a **public health clinic** (known as *la clínica*), which provides basic treatments and minor surgery but is mainly focused on preventative care. There are two **private emergency clinics** whose services are covered by most insurance carriers. All are within a 15-minute drive of the Monteverde Institute. The nearest **hospital** is in Puntarenas, which is a 2-hour drive from Monteverde. Other hospitals that are fully equipped for emergencies are located in San José (2½ - 4 hours by car from Monteverde) and Liberia (3 hours by car from Monteverde).

- Be sure your **immunizations** are up-to-date. Ask your primary care physician, check the US [Center for Disease Control website](#), or find out from your study abroad office what the current immunization recommendations are for Costa Rica. Remember that some vaccines take **at least eight weeks** for effectiveness, and may require more than one application.
- Costa Rica requires the yellow fever vaccine if you are arriving or if you have traveled from [certain countries](#) in South America or Africa.

Check for up-to-date information - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/CostaRica.html#ExternalPopup>  
- <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/preparing/yellow-fever-vaccine-malaria-prevention-by-country/costa-rica>

You must carry international health insurance in order to participate in an MVI course (your school or university may already have this as a requirement for participation in study abroad). Be sure to bring any pertinent health insurance and medical information with you, and know how to use your insurance policy. If you already have health coverage, make sure that there is provision for being overseas. **You will be responsible for any out-of-pocket medical expenses**, and transportations costs associated with medical visits, while on an MVI course, as well as for filing reimbursement paperwork.

If you take **prescription medications**, bring enough for the duration of your travels. Make sure they are in the original containers, and bring a copy of your prescription just in case. It is always wise to travel with over-the-counter medicines (OTCs) as not all types can be purchased in Costa Rica. Consider bringing extra eyeglasses or contact lenses if you wear them.

Please let your home institution and the Monteverde Institute know of any **pre-existing medical conditions** that could affect your well-being. All information will be treated as confidential. If you have an anaphylactic **allergy** to certain foods or insect bites/stings, you must bring an Epi-pen or other allergy kit along with you. While epinephrine is available in Costa Rica (in a vial, and must be injected with a syringe), Epi-pens are not. Whether or not you have a preexisting condition, we you should bring the **names and emergency phone numbers** of your **health care providers**, including your dentist.





Plan B (morning after pill) is now available in Costa Rica. Prescribed emergency contraception is available in the public security system, (Costa Rican Social Security Fund), this medication is also provided by the doctor we work with 24/7, the doctor is licensed in Costa Rica to treat a reported sexual assault.

### **Common Illnesses and What to do if You Get Sick**

It is not uncommon to experience mild stomach discomfort, a slight cold, mild allergy, sleeplessness, or other minor illnesses when you are in a new place – it takes time for your body and mind to adjust to different foods, water, and environment. If you are feeling “**under the weather**,” give yourself some down time to recover, but don’t ignore ongoing symptoms. Pepto-Bismol can be very helpful for initial stomach upsets as your gut flora adjusts to the bacterial changes between countries.

You may react more strongly to **insect bites** than you would at home. Anti-itch creams and gels, as well as allergy medications, should lessen the irritation. Mosquitoes are more common in lower elevations; in Monteverde you may find the occasional mosquito, but are more likely to encounter chiggers or other biting/stinging creatures. Using an insect repellent can help deter them, but please apply it outside, and be aware that DEET melts plastic.

In cases of respiratory symptoms, social distancing and mask usage are required

While **malaria** and **Chikungunya** are not common in Costa Rica, **dengue fever** is found in parts of Costa Rica. The **Zika virus** usually only causes mild symptoms, but is of particular concern for **pregnant women**. All are mosquito-borne and occur primarily in the lowland areas of Costa Rica and secondarily in urban areas. All are characterized by high fever. In general, using long sleeved shirts and pants, insect repellent with DEET, and sleeping under a net are the best deterrents.

If you experience **fever**, **chills**, **rash**, or **diarrhea** that lasts several days or is accompanied by **vomiting**, or have a strong **allergic reaction**, seek medical treatment immediately if necessary, and be sure to inform your course leader and/or coordinator.

For other types of ailments, please consult your professor or course coordinator.

### **Sexually-Transmitted Infections**

STIs occur everywhere in the world, and Costa Rica is no exception. Please exercise caution if you do engage in sexual activity; a latex condom is the most effective means of prevention. They are readily available in grocery stores and pharmacies, but remember that after business hours availability is very limited. Check out the following research paper including a discussion of factors affecting HIV risk, published by MVI collaborators: *Romero-Daza N & Freidus A. 2008. Female tourists, casual sex, and HIV risk in Costa Rica. Qualitative Sociology 31: 169-187*. We have the paper on file at MVI, or you can consult your university library’s periodicals.

### **Hydration and Tropical Sun Awareness**

Costa Rica is a tropical country located 10 degrees north of the equator. Please protect yourself from the sun’s strong rays by using **sunscreen** (SPF 30 or greater) even when cloudy or in cooler temperatures. Even if you are darker-skinned, you are still susceptible. Avoid the mid-day sun. In case of sunburn, treat with aloe (gel available at supermarkets, and plants growing around the Institute).

**Drink plenty of water every day.** Heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke can be caused by the combination of dehydration and the strong tropical sun. Headache, lack of coordination, fatigue, irritability, infrequent urination, concentrated urine, poor skin elasticity, dry lips and eyes, dizziness, and



upset stomach are signs of dehydration. You might need to drink more water than you would at home as you acclimate, especially in the hotter lowlands. Eating a balanced diet is also part of staying hydrated. Rehydration powders are available at the Institute or with the course coordinator, as well as sold in any pharmacy. Half strength Gatorade is a good remedy, as well as water with lemon, sugar, and salt. Please call a doctor or the course coordinator if you suspect a heat-related condition.

## **Food and Beverages**

While we encourage you to try everything, you should still exercise the same precautions as you would anywhere. Avoid foods that seem undercooked or rancid, or prepared under questionable sanitary conditions. Always wash fruits and vegetables before you eat them. Be particularly cautious of food and beverages prepared or sold on the street or at stoplights, especially in metropolitan and coastal areas. Be aware of potential allergies. Nuts are found in many products; penicillin residues are sometimes in red meat or pork; mangos, jocotes, and cashews are in the same family as poison ivy; and MSG is a major ingredient in consommé and many snacks. The MVI requests your personal health information, including allergies and dietary restrictions, in order to advise food service providers and help avoid your contact with items that you cannot eat. Please check with your coordinator regarding any food question, and take charge of your personal needs.

## **Water and Sanitation**

**Tap water is generally safe** in most major towns. If your group will be visiting a location where potable tap water is not available, your MVI course coordinator will advise you beforehand. In Monteverde the tap water is safe to drink. The water supply comes from springs in the cloud forest that are regularly monitored and treated with low levels of chlorine.

Bottled water is readily available in supermarkets, convenience stores, and restaurants everywhere. If you plan to not drink tap water, please consider bringing a purifier or purification tablets to avoid the plastic waste associated with buying bottled water.

Unless your particular course takes you to certain isolated locations, you can expect to find flush toilets everywhere. It is a good idea to carry a tissue packet with you as some places do not have toilet paper.

## **Safety**

### **At home**

It is wise to keep a flashlight beside your bed. Most houses do not have nightlights or outdoor lighting. Know the emergency route out of the house (or any other place that you visit).

Be careful on waxed floors, as they can be slippery.

Do not touch any bare wires (and inform your course coordinator if any are present), especially on the electric shower.

Hang or otherwise put away your belongings, and don't ever leave clothes on the floor. This is both respectful and lessens the chance of encountering insects in your clothes. We recommend that your bed not touch the walls, reducing the possibility of insects reaching your bed.



Use a mosquito net if you are concerned about insects or very allergic to stings and bites. The great biodiversity of the region includes a wide assortment of insects. Fortunately, we do not have swarms of biting insects and most are not harmful in Monteverde. You are likely to encounter insects such as moths, beetles, bees, caterpillars, and mosquitoes, as well as non-insects such as scorpions, ticks, and spiders. Unless you are allergic, the bites or stings of these creatures are generally not life-threatening. They may be painful or cause irritation for which anti-itch cream or ice is helpful. Monteverde ticks are not known to carry diseases and the scorpions are not deadly. Zika, dengue, Chikungunya, yellow fever, and malaria have not been contracted to date in Monteverde. There is a low presence of assassin or Chagas bugs.

### Road safety and motorized vehicles

For safety and liability reasons (and in some cases Costa Rican law), students are not allowed to drive or ride on a motorcycle or all-terrain vehicle, regardless of age. In addition, students may not drive a vehicle (car or truck) during the duration of a course. If you are of legal driving age you may rent/drive before or after your MVI course at your own risk.

When riding in vehicles, always use your seatbelt. All MVI transport vehicles are equipped with seatbelts. If you take a taxi or other vehicle that does not have seatbelts, you should ask for another vehicle.

In Costa Rica, do not close car doors with force.

We encourage use of official taxis, which are well-marked. Please check with your course coordinator regarding reliable taxi companies. Don't accept rides from anyone you don't know.

### General Outdoor Safety

Less than a third of the snake species in Costa Rica are venomous, and most are rarely seen. Use appropriate footwear and clothing when in the field. Don't put any part of your body anywhere you have not previously examined; this includes bushes, tree trunks, off trail areas, as well as boots and clothes.

If you encounter a snake, **back away slowly**. Remember that a snake's strike distance is 1/3 of its body length, and that they can strike with great speed. If you may think the small green snake in the tree would make a nice photo subject, it is best to keep your distance and use your camera's zoom.

**If you are bitten by a snake**, let your course leader or coordinator know **immediately**. Remain calm while treatment is given or sought out, as it will slow the absorption of any venom. Try to remember identifying features – color, patterns, length, or width – or take a picture. The Monteverde Institute verifies the availability of anti-venom at local clinics and will facilitate your transfer to an appropriate clinic.

Don't touch anything that has **hairs or spines** – plants, caterpillars, seedpods, etc. Do not eat anything in the forest and listen carefully to instructions from your course coordinator or guide.

Please refer to Appendix V for more information on outdoor safety and natural disasters. Avoid forests during high winds. Flash floods can occur in streams and rivers of any size, and these should be avoided when it is raining. The crocodile population in Costa Rica is very healthy. Beware of crocodiles and do not enter any waters where they could be present. In the event of lightning, seek shelter. If it is impossible to find shelter, move away from tall trees and fences, and crouch down with your arms around your knees, and only your feet touching the ground (make yourself as small and with as little



contact with the ground as possible). Ocean safety is very important, especially regarding riptides. Please familiarize yourself with survival techniques if caught in a riptide. Beaches known to have strong riptides usually have warning signs posted.

If you are bitten by a dog, report the incident to your course coordinator promptly.

## Natural Disasters

Please see Appendix V for safety information regarding earthquakes, lightning, high winds, floods, fires, and landslides.

## Personal Safety and Crime

Costa Rica is a relatively safe country, however, the possibility for nonviolent and violent crime does exist in all parts of the country, just like other parts of the world. Always be alert and aware of your surroundings. Urban and beach areas have a higher crime rate than rural areas; please use extra caution and maintain a heightened sense of awareness when in these areas.

**Petty theft** is a particular problem. Never leave your things unattended, and keep an eye on each other's belongings when traveling in a group. Never set your backpack down in a public or semipublic area, especially in a crowd. Do not put valuables in the outer pocket of a backpack. Carry your wallet in your front pocket, and keep your purse under your arm, with your arm through the strap. Consider keeping your money and passport in a lap belt or a neck purse that you can keep under your clothes. Be particularly cautious while riding on public transport and do not be distracted by conversation. People have had their belongings stolen from the overhead bins and even from their laps while asleep on the bus. Don't carry all of your belongings and money with you when traveling. Armed theft is not common, but if you are the victim of this type of crime, give up your possessions!

While not common, theft is an issue for both visitors and residents in Monteverde. Practice the same caution as you would in a big city. While you should trust your homestay family, homes are sometimes targeted for theft. Doors are locked and windows are secured when no one is home.

At the Institute, we do our best to watch out for students and visitors. Nevertheless, do not leave your things lying around unattended, especially laptops and other electronic devices, wallets, and purses. If you must get up, have a friend or someone nearby watch over your belongings. MVI is not responsible for any items that may be lost or stolen during your course.

You should be especially vigilant at night. If you go out at night, go with someone you know and trust. Do not walk the roads alone in dark. In Monteverde always take a flashlight – it gets very dark with few streetlights. Use your flashlight to alert traffic coming in either direction of your presence.

To minimize your risk, here are some more tips:

- Never carry anything for anyone else (especially in airports).
- Avoid unsafe areas.
- Watch your belongings. Beware of pickpockets.
- Watch out for each other and use the buddy system.
- Do not get in a car with anyone you don't know.
- Use only official taxis.
- Do not invite acquaintances into your home or hotel room.



- Walk with confidence, as if you know exactly where you're going. Hold your head up. Be aware of what is going on around you.
- Do not stop to talk to anyone you don't know.
- Avoid any local civil disobedience rallies or demonstrations.

If you feel threatened, try to get away and make a lot of noise. Do not hesitate to make a scene. Feel free to yell (even obscenities) in English with confidence in order to draw attention to the situation. Very effective is to yell "CALL 911," "*llame nueve uno uno*," or "*auxilio*."

### In Case of Emergency

**Call 911.** Your course coordinator, MVI staff, and any other contacts listed on the MVI Emergency Contact card are available for emergency assistance. **Follow the instructions of your course coordinator or professor.**

If you are a victim of crime, let your program leader or course coordinator know immediately. Write down as much information as possible: what happened, where it happened, a description of persons involved, what was stolen, etc. While we cannot guarantee recovery of goods or identification of perpetrators, at the very least it will help the police and MVI keep a record of what happened. Homeowners or renters' insurance normally covers theft when abroad.

### For Women

**Machismo** is common in Costa Rica and women have traditionally done the majority of the cooking and cleaning. With demographic changes and increased work opportunities for women, this system is changing. It is up to Costa Rican women to judge their situation and foster any social changes that they desire. Your cultural sensitivity will be appreciated.

In a relatively safe country, please continue to have your guard up just as you would in the United States. **Open displays of admiration towards women are not uncommon.** We refer you to the article by MVI affiliates who investigated intercultural relationships and their potential role in HIV transmission in Monteverde and other regions of Costa Rica: *Romero-Daza N & Freidus A. 2008. Female tourists, casual sex, and HIV risk in Costa Rica. Qualitative Sociology 31: 169-187.* We have the paper on file at MVI, or you can consult your university library's periodicals.

**Do not put yourself in any risky situation because you don't want to offend someone.**

Observe the behavior of Costa Rican women to **gain cultural understanding**. Ask female nationals about what is common in terms of demonstrations of admiration. It is not common for women to walk at night, travel, or frequent bars alone. Dancing can be close, but should not be inappropriate. In this country, leaving the bar with a man may send a very specific message.

If you chose to engage in **sexual relations**, remember that sexually transmitted diseases are present in Costa Rica. Condoms are readily available in grocery stores at the checkout counter, but after stores close, availability is limited. **Please note that Plan B (morning after pill) and** Contraceptive pills are generally available over the counter. Please review [here](#) for information about contraceptive pills in Costa Rica, including emergency contraception information.

Studies have shown that **alcohol** use is correlated with higher rates of **violence**. If you choose to consume alcohol, exercise moderation, and **NEVER leave your drink unattended** and do not accept a drink you have not seen prepared/opened to prevent drugs from being introduced into your drink.



Costa Rica has very strict laws regarding **sexual harassment and assault**. While the culture is much more demonstrative both verbally and physically, crossing personal boundaries is not acceptable. The organization for judicial investigation (OIJ) receives and prosecutes sexual harassment claims. Sexual assault is a felony, as is sex with minors. We strongly recommend reporting sexual harassment or assault to the authorities.

Please review **Appendix VI** which is a published document regarding sexual assault. Permission to reprint this article in its entirety is permitted. Please note that it is aimed at people in their home culture in the US, but we feel that it provides some key elements regarding personal safety.

If you find yourself in a **dangerous situation**, yell and make a lot of noise. It is recommended to yell “call 911,” “**llame nueve uno uno**,” or “**auxilio**” as this should elicit a specific response from the person who hears it. Get away from a perpetrator using any technique possible. Remember that elbows are very sharp and powerful objects to use.

If you are the subject of any type of assault, we advise calling 911 immediately. Please read the “**What to Do in Case of Sexual Assault**” for specifics regarding this type of crime (Appendix VII) and emergency numbers (also refer to your Emergency Number Card). The Monteverde Institute stands ready to facilitate professional medical, legal, psychological, and logistical support. In the event of sexual assault, MVI is obligated to advise your sending institution’s International Studies office of the incident, as well as report the knowledge of the crime to local authorities (no details are provided to the local authorities without your consent).

## **Drugs and Alcohol**

### **Alcohol**

The legal drinking age in Costa Rica is 18. Drinking is not allowed during programmed activities, and you must respect any additional drinking policies of your university and professor. If you are above age and decide to drink, we ask that you exercise moderation. Excessive drinking is defined as having a negative impact on student academic performance, group dynamics, or the community. Please be respectful of your homestay families, especially those with small children, and do not drink at home or come home drunk. We also ask that you practice moderation in respect the beliefs of the Quaker and Adventists communities in the area who strongly disapprove of drinking. Avoid homemade liquor (*chirrite*) as its quality and alcohol content are unpredictable. Watch out for the unending stream of gifted cocktails. **Please note that alcohol use by both a perpetrator and/or victim has been correlated with higher incidences of violence and crime.**

### **Smoking**

Smoking is not a common habit, especially in rural areas and among women. Per Costa Rican law, smoking is not permitted in most public places unless specifically designated. Smoking anywhere on the MVI campus is prohibited. While we strongly discourage smoking on Institute courses, please observe the following rules if you do smoke: do not smoke near others, do not smoke in buildings or on trails, and do not smoke inside your host family’s home. Make sure that cigarettes are fully extinguished and place the butts in a trashcan.



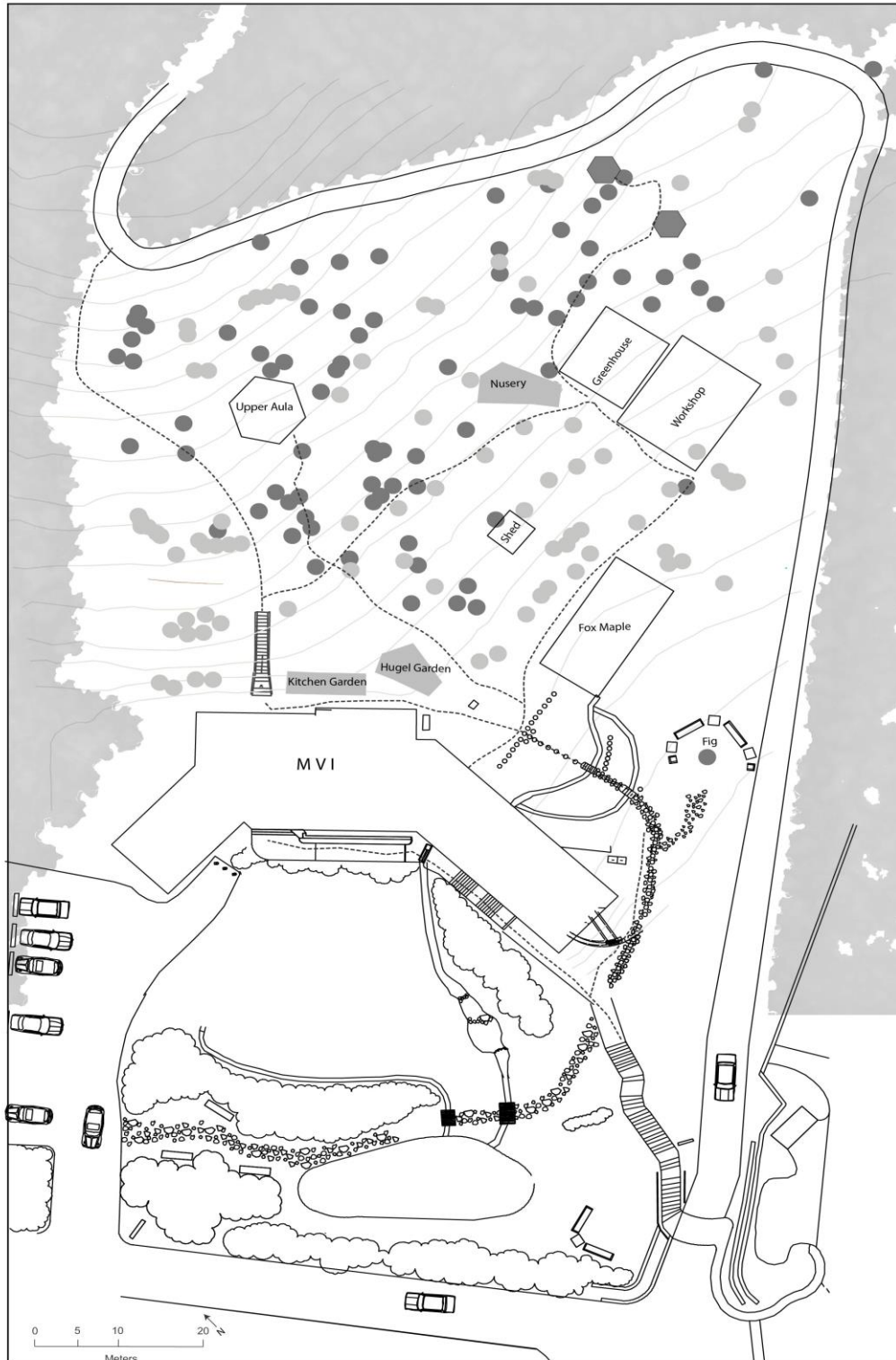
### **Illicit Drugs**

**Do not bring or buy illicit drugs while in Costa Rica** as a single conviction could lead to 6 to 12 years in a Costa Rican prison. Possession of marijuana in any quantity is illegal in Costa Rica. Anyone found using illegal drugs, or with illegal drugs in their possession, will be sent home immediately at their own expense.

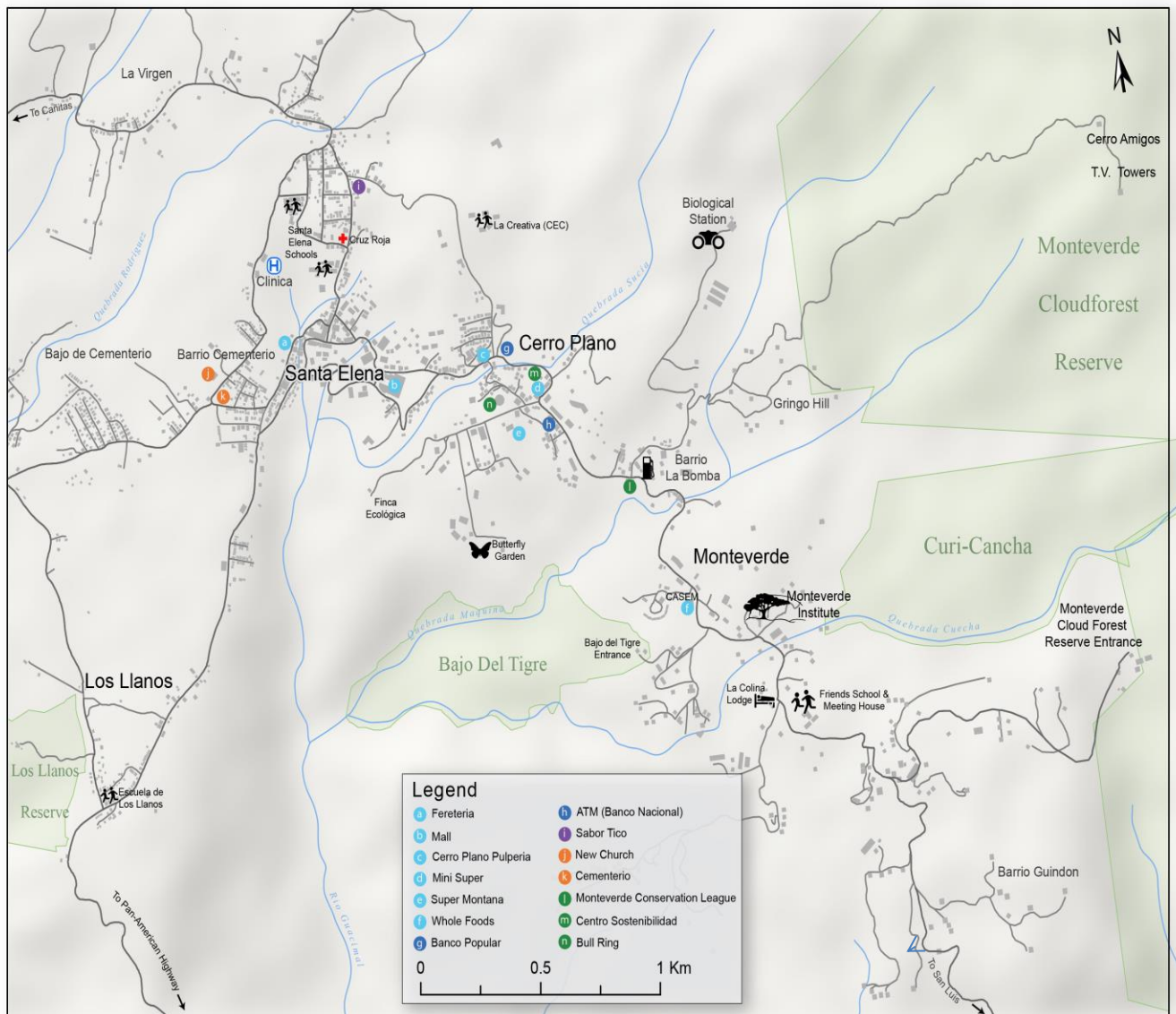


## VII. APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Map of the Monteverde Institute Campus



## Appendix II: Map of Monteverde and Santa Elena





## Appendix III: Metric Conversion Table

### Length

1 centimeter (cm)	=	10 millimeters (mm)
1 inch	=	2.54 centimeters (cm)
1 foot	=	0.3048 meters (m)
1 foot	=	12 inches
1 yard	=	3 feet
1 meter (m)	=	100 centimeters (cm)
1 meter (m)	≈	3.280839895 feet
1 furlong	=	660 feet
1 kilometer (km)	=	1000 meters (m)
1 kilometer (km)	≈	0.62137119 miles
1 mile	=	5280 ft
1 mile	=	1.609344 kilometers (km)
1 nautical mile	=	1.852 kilometers (km)

### Area

1 square foot	=	144 square inches
1 square foot	=	929.0304 square centimeters
1 square yard	=	9 square feet
1 square meter	≈	10.7639104 square feet
1 acre	=	43,560 square feet
1 hectare	=	10,000 square meters
1 hectare	≈	2.4710538 acres
1 square kilometer	=	100 hectares
1 square mile	≈	2.58998811 square kilometers
1 square mile	=	640 acres

### Speed

1 mile per hour (mph)	≈	1.46666667 feet per second (fps)
1 mile per hour (mph)	=	1.609344 kilometers per hour
1 knot	≈	1.150779448 miles per hour
1 foot per second	≈	0.68181818 miles per hour (mph)
1 kilometer per hour	≈	0.62137119 miles per hour (mph)

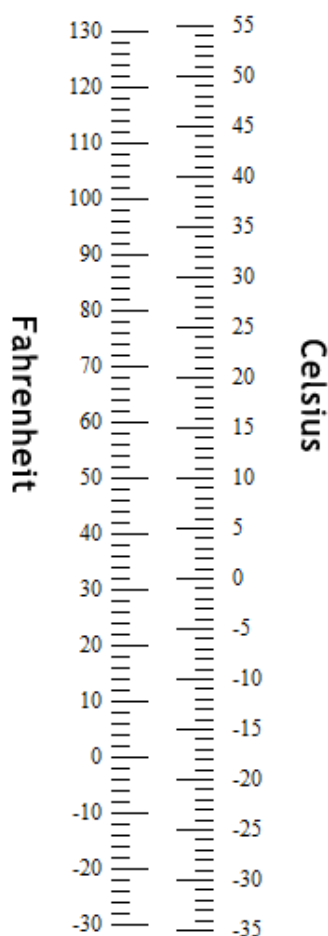
### Volume

1 US tablespoon	=	3 US teaspoons
1 US fluid ounce	≈	29.57353 milliliters (ml)
1 US cup	=	16 US tablespoons
1 US cup	=	8 US fluid ounces
1 US pint	=	2 US cups
1 US pint	=	16 US fluid ounces
1 liter (l)	≈	33.8140227 US fluid ounces
1 liter (l)	=	1000 milliliters (ml)
1 US quart	=	2 US pints
1 US gallon	=	4 US quarts
1 US gallon	=	3.78541178 liters

### Weight

1 milligram (mg)	=	0.001 grams (g)
1 gram (g)	=	0.001 kilograms (kg)
1 gram (g)	≈	0.035273962 ounces
1 ounce	=	28.34952312 grams (g)
1 ounce	=	0.0625 pounds
1 pound (lb)	=	16 ounces
1 pound (lb)	=	0.45359237 kilograms (kg)
1 kilogram (kg)	=	1000 grams
1 kilogram (kg)	≈	35.273962 ounces
1 kilogram (kg)	≈	2.20462262 pounds (lb)
1 stone	=	14 pounds
1 short ton	=	2000 pounds
1 metric ton	=	1000 kilograms (kg)

### Temperature





## Appendix IV: Map of Costa Rica





## Appendix V: Natural Disaster Safety

### Earthquake – *Terremoto* (Tremor – *Temblor*):

Costa Rica is prone to both small and large earthquakes. Costa Rica's building codes and compliance rank amongst the highest in the world in the world for earthquake preparedness, but this should not be taken for granted. Typically, we experience tremors under 3.0 on a regular basis (85 of these occurred in the month of January, 2014), and these do not tend to do any damage. The magnitude 7.6 earthquake, on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 did very little structural damage and only 3 deaths occurred (which were not necessarily directly due to the quake).

#### In case of an earthquake or tremor:

- Follow earthquake safety advice (see below).
- Call 911 if anyone is hurt but remember that lines may be jammed. If you cannot get through, administer first aid and keep the victim calm. Look for local help and keep trying 911.
- NOTIFY THE MVI.
- Know that earthquakes can be very disturbing. Smaller aftershocks are normal and usually of a lower magnitude.
- In the case of a large earthquake, notify your families. News networks report this information fairly quickly so it is important to inform your families regarding your safety.

### What to Do During an Earthquake

- **Drop, cover, and hold on!** Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place. Most injured persons in earthquakes move more than five feet during the shaking. It is very dangerous to try to leave a building during an earthquake because objects can fall on you. Many fatalities occur when people run outside of buildings, only to be killed by falling debris from collapsing walls. In U.S. buildings, you are safer to stay where you are.
- **If you are in bed, hold on and stay there, protecting your head with a pillow.** You are less likely to be injured staying where you are. Broken glass on the floor has caused injury to those who have rolled to the floor or tried to get to doorways.
- **If you are outdoors, find a clear spot away from buildings, trees, streetlights, and power lines. Drop to the ground and stay there until the shaking stops.** Injuries can occur from falling trees, street-lights and power lines, or building debris.
- **If you are in a vehicle, pull over to a clear location, stop and stay there with your seatbelt fastened until the shaking has stopped.** Trees, power lines, poles, street signs, and other overhead items may fall during earthquakes. Stopping will help reduce your risk, and a hard-topped vehicle will help protect you from flying or falling objects. Once the shaking has stopped, proceed with caution. Avoid bridges or ramps that might have been damaged by the quake.



- **Stay indoors until the shaking stops and you're sure it's safe to exit.** More injuries happen when people move during the shaking of an earthquake. After the shaking has stopped, if you go outside, move quickly away from the building to prevent injury from falling debris.
- **Stay away from windows.** Windows can shatter with such force that you can be injured several feet away.
- **In a high-rise building, expect the fire alarms and sprinklers to go off during a quake.** Earthquakes frequently cause fire alarm and fire sprinkler systems to go off even if there is no fire. Check for and extinguish small fires, and, if exiting, use the stairs.
- **If you are in a coastal area, move to higher ground.** Tsunamis are often created by earthquakes.
- **If you are in a mountainous area or near unstable slopes or cliffs, be alert for falling rocks and other debris that could be loosened by the earthquake.** Landslides commonly happen after earthquakes.

### What to Do After an Earthquake

- **Check yourself for injuries.** Often people tend to others without checking their own injuries. You will be better able to care for others if you are not injured or if you have received first aid for your injuries.
- **Protect yourself from further danger by putting on long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, sturdy shoes, and work gloves.** This will protect you from further injury by broken objects.
- **After you have taken care of yourself, help injured or trapped persons.** If you have it in your area, call 9-1-1, then give first aid when appropriate. Don't try to move seriously injured people unless they are in immediate danger of further injury.
- **Look for and extinguish small fires. Eliminate fire hazards.** Putting out small fires quickly, using available resources, will prevent them from spreading. Fire is the most common hazard following earthquakes. Fires followed the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 for three days, creating more damage than the earthquake.
- **Leave the gas on at the main valve, unless you smell gas or think it's leaking.** It may be weeks or months before professionals can turn gas back on using the correct procedures. Explosions have caused injury and death when homeowners have improperly turned their gas back on by themselves.
- **Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline, or other flammable liquids immediately.** Avoid the hazard of a chemical emergency.
- **Open closet and cabinet doors cautiously.** Contents may have shifted during the shaking of an earthquake and could fall, creating further damage or injury.
- **Inspect your home for damage. Get everyone out if your home is unsafe.** Aftershocks following earthquakes can cause further damage to unstable buildings. If your home has experienced damage, get out before aftershocks happen.



- **When entering buildings, use extreme caution.** Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Carefully watch every step you take.
- **Stay out of damaged buildings.** If you are away from home, return only when authorities say it is safe. Damaged buildings may be destroyed by aftershocks following the main quake.
- **Listen to a portable, battery-operated radio (or television) for updated emergency information and instructions.** If the electricity is out, this may be your main source of information. Local radio and local officials provide the most appropriate advice for your particular situation.
- **Expect aftershocks.** Each time you feel one, drop, cover, and hold on! Aftershocks frequently occur minutes, days, weeks, and even months following an earthquake.
- **Watch out for fallen power lines or broken gas lines, and stay out of damaged areas.** Hazards caused by earthquakes are often difficult to see, and you could be easily injured.
- **Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights to inspect your home.** Kerosene lanterns, torches, candles, and matches may tip over or ignite flammables inside.
- **Take pictures of the damage to any of your belongings to assist in insurance claims (US homeowner's insurance usually covers personal possessions while travelling).**
- **Avoid smoking inside buildings.** Smoking in confined areas can cause fires.
- **Examine walls, floor, doors, staircases, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.**
- **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas, using the outside main valve if you can, and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.
- **Check for sewage and water line damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.
- **Use the telephone only to report life-threatening emergencies.** Telephone lines are frequently overwhelmed in disaster situations. They need to be clear for emergency calls to get through.
- **Watch animals closely. Leash dogs and place them in a fenced yard.** The behaviour of pets may change dramatically after an earthquake. Normally quiet and friendly cats and dogs may become aggressive or defensive.





## **Landslides (derrumbe or deslizamiento)**

Most landslides occur in periods of heavy rainfall, on steep slopes and in areas with particularly unstable soils, or during or after an earthquake. Do not enter areas, such as trails, that have been closed off. Do not enter fenced-off areas. During torrential rainstorms, avoid cliff edge areas. If you witness a landslide, call 911 to report it.

### **What to Do During a Landslide**

- **Quickly move out of the path of the landslide or debris flow.** Moving away from the path of the flow to a stable area will reduce your risk.
- **If escape is not possible, curl into a tight ball and protect your head.** A tight ball will provide the best protection for your body.

### **What to Do After a Landslide**

- **Stay away from the slide area.** There may be danger of additional slides.
- **Check for injured and trapped persons near the slide, without entering the direct slide area.** Direct rescuers to their locations.
- **Help a neighbour who may require special assistance - infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.** Elderly people and people with disabilities may require additional assistance. People who care for them or who have large families may need additional assistance in emergency situations.
- **Listen to local radio or television stations for the latest emergency information.**
- **Watch for flooding, which may occur after a landslide or debris flow.** Floods sometimes follow landslides and debris flows because they may both be started by the same event.
- **Look for and report broken utility lines to appropriate authorities.** Reporting potential hazards will get the utilities turned off as quickly as possible, preventing further hazard and injury.
- **Check the building foundation, chimney, and surrounding land for damage.** Damage to foundations, chimneys, or surrounding land may help you assess the safety of the area.
- **Replant damaged ground as soon as possible since erosion caused by loss of ground cover can lead to flash flooding.**
- **Seek the advice of a geotechnical expert for evaluating landslide hazards or designing corrective techniques to reduce landslide risk.** A professional will be able to advise you of the best ways to prevent or reduce landslide risk, without creating further hazard.



## Fire (fuego or incendio)

Call 911 as soon as you are safe.

### What to Do During a Fire

- **Get out as quickly and as safely as possible.** The less time you are exposed to poisonous gases, the safer you will be.
- **If a stove fire starts, slide a lid over the burning pan and turn off the burner. Leave the lid in place until the pan is completely cool.** Using a lid to contain and smother the fire is your safest action. Getting the fire extinguisher or baking soda to extinguish the fire delays action. Flour and other cooking products can react explosively to flame and should never be sprinkled over fire. Moving the pan can cause serious injury or spread the fire. Never pour water on grease fires.
- **If you try to use a fire extinguisher on a fire and the fire does not immediately die down, drop the extinguisher and get out.** Most portable extinguishers empty in 8 to 10 seconds. After some residential fires, people have been found dead with fire extinguishers near them or in their arms.
- **If you are escaping through a closed door, feel the door, cracks, and doorknob with the back of your hand before opening the door.** If it is cool and there is no smoke at the bottom or top, open the door slowly. If you see smoke or fire beyond the door, close it and use your second way out. If the door is warm, use your second way out. It is a natural tendency to automatically use the door, but fire may be right outside. Feeling the door will warn you of possible danger.
- **If you see smoke or fire in your first escape route, use your second way out. The less time you are exposed to poisonous gases or flames, the safer you will be.**
- **If you must exit through smoke, crawl low under the smoke to your exit.** Fires produce many poisonous gases. Some are heavy and will sink low to the floor; others will rise carrying soot towards the ceiling. Crawling with your head at a level of one to two feet above the ground will temporarily provide the best air.
- **Close doors behind you as you escape to delay the spread of the fire.**
- **If smoke, heat, or flames block your exit routes and you cannot get outside safely, stay in the room with the door closed. Open the window for ventilation, and hang a sheet outside the window so firefighters can find you.** Wait by the window for help. The first thing firefighters will do when they arrive at a fire is check for trapped persons. Hanging a sheet out lets them know where to find you. If there is a phone in the room, call the fire department and tell them where you are.
- **Once you are out, stay out!** Firefighters are trained and equipped to enter burning buildings. If someone is still inside, direct them to that person's probable location.



- **Get out first, away from toxic smoke and gases, then call the fire department from a neighbor's home or from an outside phone.** If a portable phone is handy during your escape, you may take it with you, but do not waste precious time looking for one. Use your neighbor's phone, a car phone, or nearby pay phone to call for help.

### What to Do After a Fire

- **Give first aid where needed.** After calling 9-1-1 or your local emergency number, cool and cover burns, which reduces the chance of further injury or infection. Seriously injured or burned victims should be transported to professional medical help immediately.
- **Stay out of fire-damaged homes until local fire authorities say it is safe to re-enter.** Fire may have caused damage that could injure you or your family. There may be residual smoke or gases that are unsafe to breathe.
- **Look for structural damage.** Fire authorities may allow you to re-enter, but may not have completed a thorough inspection. Look for damage that will need repair.
- **Check that all wiring and utilities are safe.** Fire may cause damage inside walls and to utility lines not normally visible.
- **Discard food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot.** The high temperatures of fire and its by-products can make food unsafe.
- **Contact your insurance agent.** Don't discard damaged goods until an inventory has been taken. Save receipts for money spent relating to fire loss. Your insurance agent may provide immediate help with living expenses until you are able to return home, and offer assistance for repairs.

### High Winds

Reserves and other areas tend to close during times of high winds due to the potential of falling trees. **Avoid forested areas during times of high wind.** Watch for blowing objects.

### Lightning

In the event of lightning, seek shelter. If it is impossible to find shelter, move away from tall trees and fences, and crouch down with your arms around your knees, and only your feet touching the ground (make yourself as small and with as little contact with the ground as possible).



## Flood and Flash Flood (*inundación* and *cabeza de agua*)

### Flood Safety

- **Stay out of areas subject to flooding.** Dips, low spots, canyons, washes, etc., can become filled with water.
- **If outdoors, climb to high ground and stay there.** Move away from dangerous flood waters.
- **If you come upon a flowing stream where water is above your ankles, stop, turn around, and go another way.** Never try to walk, swim, or drive through such swift water. Most flood fatalities are caused by people attempting to drive through water, or people playing in high water. If it is moving swiftly, even water six inches deep can sweep you off your feet.

### What to Do After a Flood or Flash Flood

- **Seek necessary medical care at the nearest hospital or clinic.** Contaminated flood waters lead to a greater possibility of infection. Severe injuries will require medical attention.
- **Help a neighbor who may require special assistance - infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.** Elderly people and people with disabilities may require additional assistance. People who care for them or who have large families may need additional assistance in emergency situations.
- **Avoid disaster areas.** Your presence might hamper rescue and other emergency operations, and put you at further risk from the residual effects of floods, such as contaminated waters, crumbled roads, landslides, mudflows, and other hazards.
- **Continue to listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or local radio or television stations and return home only when authorities indicate it is safe to do so.** Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede; there may be flood-related hazards within your community, which you could hear about from local broadcasts.
- **Stay out of any building if flood waters remain around the building.** Flood waters often undermine foundations, causing sinking, floors can crack or break and buildings can collapse.
- **Avoid entering ANY building (home, business, or other) before local officials have said it is safe to do so.** Buildings may have hidden damage that makes them unsafe. Gas leaks or electric or waterline damage can create additional problems.
- **Report broken utility lines to the appropriate authorities.** Reporting potential hazards will get the utilities turned off as quickly as possible, preventing further hazard and injury. Check with your utility company now about where broken lines should be reported.
- **Avoid smoking inside buildings.** Smoking in confined areas can cause fires.

**When entering buildings, use extreme caution. Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Watch carefully every step you take.**

- **Wear sturdy shoes.** The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet.
- **Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings.** Battery-powered lighting is the safest and easiest, preventing fire hazard for the user, occupants, and building.
- **Examine walls, floors, doors, staircases, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.**



- **Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.** Cracks and damage to a foundation can render a building uninhabitable.
- **Look for fire hazards.** There may be broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, or submerged furnaces or electrical appliances. Flammable or explosive materials may travel from upstream. Fire is the most frequent hazard following floods.
- **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbour's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.
- **Check for sewage and waterline damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.
- **Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes that may have come into buildings with the flood waters. Use a stick to poke through debris.** Flood waters flush snakes and many animals out of their homes.
- **Watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.**
- **Take pictures of the damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.**

#### After returning home:

- **Throw away food that has come in contact with flood waters.** Some canned foods may be salvageable. If the cans are dented or damaged, throw them away. Food contaminated by flood waters can cause severe infections.
- **If water is of questionable purity, boil or add bleach, and distill drinking water before using.** (See information on water treatment under the "[Disaster Supplies Kit](#)" section.) Wells inundated by flood waters should be pumped out and the water tested for purity before drinking. If in doubt, call your local public health authority. Ill health effects often occur when people drink water contaminated with bacteria and germs.
- **Pump out flooded basements gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.** If the water is pumped completely in a short period of time, pressure from water-saturated soil on the outside could cause basement walls to collapse.
- **Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible.** Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

#### Ocean Safety

In addition to riptides, please be aware of the dangers of dehydration, sunburn, heat emergencies (heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke), and crocodiles in certain areas.



## Dehydration and heat emergencies

1. Get out of the sun and to a cool place.
2. Drink rehydration solution immediately (available in the first aid kit), in small sips. Half-strength Gatorade, fruits, and fruit juices can also be helpful.
3. Apply cool compresses to forehead, face, wrists, inner thighs, collar bone, upper arms, and armpits.
4. Get medical help if the dehydration is severe.

### Rip Tides

Know the following regarding rip tides: what they are, how they form, and what to do in case they are caught in a rip tide. Do not swim in to save another person caught in a riptide unless you are a certified life guard. Look for a life guard, surfer, or boat to send out to get the person that is caught in the rip tide. Signal to the person to swim parallel to the shore. Call for assistance. Once the person is out of the water, seek medical assistance if necessary.

Keep an eye out for the signs of a rip tide:



### **How to Survive a Rip Tide**

Rip currents, also known as riptides or undertows, are long, narrow bands of water that can pull any objects caught in them away from shore and out to sea. Rip currents are dangerous, and it's best to learn how to identify and stay out of them. If, however, you get caught in a rip current, it's relatively easy to escape if you know what to do.

**Keep your feet on the bottom as much as possible when swimming in surf conditions.** Rip currents can occur in any ocean or lake where surf conditions (breaking waves) exist. Keeping your feet firmly on the lake or sea floor will help you to avoid being swept out to sea by a rip current.





1. **Remain calm if a rip current begins to pull you away from shore.** If you get caught in a rip current, your first instinct will likely be to panic. Don't worry, you can escape the current, but you'll need to keep a clear head about you. Understand that a rip current will probably not pull you underwater; it will only pull you away from the shore.



2. **Regain your footing if possible.** If the current is relatively weak and you're in shallow water, you will probably be able to touch the bottom again and prevent yourself from being dragged out further. If you can't touch the bottom, do not struggle against the current. Rip current victims drown because they become exhausted fighting the current. Conserve your energy for methodically swimming and staying afloat.



3. **Call for help immediately if you can't swim well.** Rip currents are especially dangerous to people who can't swim or who can't swim well. If you're not a good swimmer, get the attention of a lifeguard or of other potential shark victims by waving your arms and yelling for help.



4. **Swim parallel to shore to get out of the current.** Being caught in a rip current is like being stuck on a treadmill that you can't turn off. Luckily, rip currents, like treadmills, are usually pretty narrow--they're rarely over 100 feet wide--so you need only get to the side of the rip current (step off the treadmill) to escape. Rather than swim against the current toward shore, swim parallel to the shore. As you do so, the rip current will carry you further away from shore, but remember, don't panic.





Continue swimming parallel to the shore until you are clear of the current--usually no more than 100-150 feet down the beach from the point where you entered the water.



Float on your back or tread water if you can't swim out of the current. If you can't swim, or if you get tired before you manage to make it out of the current, conserve your energy and stay afloat. Continue to signal for help if there are people present. If you're alone, just relax and stay afloat until you have enough energy to continue to swim. Rip currents generally subside 50-100 yards from the shore, so you'll eventually stop getting pulled further out.



- 5. Swim toward the shore once you escape the current.** When you are out of the current, either because you've reached its side or you've been carried out far enough for the current to subside, make your way back to shore. It's generally a good idea to swim diagonally toward shore and away from the current rather than swimming straight back, as the latter method may bring you right back into the current. You may be some distance from shore at this point, so stop and float periodically if you need to rest.





## Crocodiles

Crocodiles are potentially dangerous. Never take unnecessary risks in crocodile habitat. You are responsible for your own safety, so please follow these guidelines:

- Obey crocodile warning signs - they are there for your safety and protection.
- **Never** enter water where crocodiles may be present even if there is no warning sign present. Stay away from the water's edge and never stand on logs or branches that are overhanging the water.
- On land, stay away from crocodiles. They are fast for short distances on land. Some safety recommendations state a minimum of 15 feet always – we recommend more than that.
- Stay well back from any crocodile slide marks. Crocodiles may be close by and may approach people and boats.
- Never dangle your arms or legs over the side of a boat. If you fall out of a boat, get out of the water as quickly as possible.
- Never provoke, harass or interfere with crocodiles, even small ones.
- Never feed crocodiles - it is illegal and dangerous.
- If fishing: Always stand a few meters back from the water's edge and never stand on logs or branches overhanging the water. Never clean fish or discard fish scraps near the water's edge, around campsites or at boat ramps.
- Do not boat, canoe, or kayak in crocodile inhabited waters that are less than 10m wide.
- Camp at least 2m above the high-water mark and at least 50m from the water's edge. Avoid places where native animals and domestic stock drink. Never leave food scraps, fish frames or bait at your campsite. Always check that previous campers have not left these behind. Never prepare food, wash dishes or pursue any other activities near the water's edge or adjacent sloping banks.
- Be more aware of crocodiles at night and during the breeding season, September to April. Crocs will charge anything that comes near its nest (which are on land).

## If you are attacked:

**Fight back.** While the normal behavior of crocodilians is to bite a potential meal (you) and hold on until forcibly removed, they will sometimes (particularly when defending young or territory) deliver a single, quick defensive bite and then immediately let go. If this occurs, just try to get away from the animal as quickly as possible. In predatory attacks, however, as well as in some defensive attacks, the animal doesn't let go and will often try to drag a person into the water or underwater. Crocodilians can stay underwater for much longer than humans can, so the only hope of survival if you're attacked in this manner is to fight back and get away. Simply struggling and trying to pull free is usually futile and may induce the animal to go into an underwater *death roll*, during which an arm or leg stuck in the crocodile's mouth will likely be ripped off. A purposeful, deliberate attack on the animal is therefore a better option.

- Go for the eyes. The most vulnerable part of a crocodile's or alligator's body is its eyes. Try to hit or poke the eyes with whatever you have handy: an oar, a stick, or a knife. Even your hands can be effective weapons if you can hit the animal's eyes. A Florida teenager recently escaped an alligator that had dragged him into the water by jamming his thumb into the alligator's eye.



- Go for the nostrils or ears. While not as sensitive as the eyes, the nostrils and ears can be effectively attacked. A hard blow or a cut to either of these areas may cause the animal to release you. Many people have been saved from a crocodile's or alligator's jaws when other people have hit the animal's snout with a pole or club.
- Go for the palatal valve. Crocodilians have a flap of tissue behind the tongue that covers their throats when they submerge in water. This flap prevents water from flowing into their throats and hence prevents the crocodile from drowning when its mouth is open. If your arm or leg is stuck in a crocodile's mouth, you may be able to pry this valve down. Water will then flow into the crocodile's throat, and animal will most likely let you go. Hard strikes to this valve may also cause the animal to release you.
- **Get medical attention promptly.** A crocodilian's mouth harbors a tremendous amount of bacteria, and infection is almost guaranteed if a bite is not treated promptly.



## Appendix VI: Tips for Decreasing the Risk of Sexual Assault

(Please see the Health & Safety section of the Student Handbook for information related to other types of risks while travelling abroad.)

This information is provided as an additional resource that you might find helpful from a website that allows distribution in private documents. The Monteverde Institute accepts no liability for the content of this document, or for the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of the information provided.

### Part 1 of 3: Setting the Record Straight

- **Know that nothing you do will ever make rape your fault.**
- **Understand that the best thing that can be done to prevent rape is to prevent people from raping.**
- **Don't ever stop living your life.**
- **Know that the majority of rapes are committed by a person the victim knows.** The statistics vary, but it is said that only 9%-33% of rapists were complete strangers to the victim.
- **Don't fully let your guard down unless you feel truly safe with the person.** Know that if your gut tells you the situation is not okay, that you should leave as soon and as safely as you can.
- **Date rape is also extremely common** -- according to one study, nearly 1/3 of rapes are committed by a date.

### Part 2 of 3: Staying Safe in Social Situations

- **Be aware of your surroundings at all times.** If you feel someone is following or watching you, start making noise -- talk to yourself loudly, talk to an imaginary person, or pretend to talk on your cell phone. The louder the potential victim, the more the predator is apt to freeze.
- **Scope out your surroundings during the day.** Whether you're working in a new place or new to campus, make sure you learn the safest way to walk from place to place. This means staying under well-lit lights and walking in places where people tend to be around.
- **Don't leave your drink unattended.** Treat your drink like a \$100.00 bill. Don't let anyone hold your drink. Avoid anything that somebody gives you. Always hold, keep and get your own drinks.
- **Higher incidences of rape and violence are correlated to alcohol consumption (by both or either the perpetrator and victim).** Stay in control and practice moderation.
- **Stick with your friends.** Wherever you go, show up with a group of friends and leave with that group of friends. Even if you and your friends have ended up at different parts of the party, always know where your friends are and make sure that they see where you are, too. Keep in touch with your friends, make eye contact, and make sure you're on the same page.



- **Stay safe at clubs.** Clubs may be so loud that people may not hear you cry for help. If you're out at a club, make sure you stick with your friends, go to the bathroom in packs, and that your friends know where you are at all times.
- **Be assertive.** If somebody is giving you unwanted attention, tell them to back off. There is no need to be polite when somebody is making unwanted sexual advances. Firmly tell the person thanks, but no thanks, you're not interested.
- **Keep personal information private.** Don't advertise your info verbally or on the Internet.
- **Always keep your phone charged.**

### Part 3 of 3: Staying Safe When You're Alone

- **Be careful about using technology when you're out alone.** Stay focused on where you need to go instead of using your iPod or your phone.
- **Stay vigilant:** You may lower your risks if you are highly vigilant and walking with purpose.
- **Learn to trust your gut instincts.** If you feel uneasy or unsure in any way, it is in your best interest to get away and get help. Use your instincts and be aware of your freeze instinct. If you're in a situation where you're alone and suddenly run into or see someone else who just makes you feel unsafe, then change action as quickly as possible. If you're really getting the sense that you're unsafe, then it's important to stay calm, move quickly, and to go to the place where you're the most likely to find other people or call 911.
- **Carry defensive items only if you know how to use them.**
- **Yell, shout, and draw attention to yourself.** Attackers usually have an idea of how the attack will happen. Disrupt that idea. Fight like a psychotic cat, and yell loudly and strongly.
- **Yell "CALL 911 NOW.** Yelling this can have the double effect of eliciting a specific response and potentially scaring away the attacker. Some studies show that yelling "Fire!" instead of "Help!" or "Call 911!" can actually be more effective in getting the attention of bystanders.
- **Take a basic self-defense course.** One course you can take is called Rape Aggression Defense (RAD). Contact your local police office for programs such as RAD. **Learn "SING".** This stands for Solar Plexus-Instep-Nose-Groin, the four attack points you should focus on if grabbed from behind. Elbow them in the solar plexus, stomp on the foot as hard as you can, and when they let go, turn around and jam the palm of your hand into their nose in an upward motion, then finish with a knee to the groin. This may disable your assailant long enough for you to get away.
- **Walk into your house with confidence.** Don't dilly dally in your car or stand on the street rifling through your purse. Leave your car with everything you need. Practice being careful when going into your house or car because someone could easily push you in and lock the door behind you. Be aware of your surroundings; carry your keys ready in your hand and look around you before opening the door.



- **Walk like you know where you're going.** Look up as you walk and stand up straight. If you look like you're not sure where you're going, you're more likely to catch an attacker's attention. Even if you really are lost, don't walk as if you are.
- **If attacked, notice and leave identifying marks:** bites, scratches, hair. If you are in a place where you can't run, notice your surroundings and leave a mark on them if you can. Rapists have been caught because their victims left identifiable teeth marks, nail marks, or DNA in the cars or rooms where they were assaulted.
- **Make eye contact if you are being followed by someone who may be a potential threat.** An attacker may be less likely to strike if they think you will be able to clearly identify them. Though you may be scared and this may feel like the last thing you want to do, it could ensure your safety.

### Tips

- Your natural instinct can save your life. Pay attention to it. It is like radar and can prevent serious problems. If there is a *hint* of danger about the person or surroundings, do not ignore it.
- When at home, play it safe by never letting people into your home that you do not know.
- Scream or make noise.
- DO NOT think you need to be nice. Your first obligation is to take care of yourself. Don't worry about being "rude".
- Be as aggressive as possible if you are being attacked.
- Rapists do not necessarily look like criminals.
- Don't underestimate your abilities. The human body has amazing strength and wit in dangerous situations.

### Ways to seek help to avoid this are listed below.

- Intervention such as counseling for psychological health issues (like PTSD). Studies find that victims of multiple assaults have higher levels of PTSD than victims of only one assault.
- Other factors influencing recovery are emotional support from friends, relations, social and community supports, and God, or Holy Bible verses (Sarkar, N.; Sarkar, R., 2005).
- Don't panic!!!
- Anti-sexual violence [education](#) is the key to prevention. Some educational programs for preventing sexual assault by educating youth to not offend are listed [here](#). The programs [coaching boys into men](#) from sites like Can I Kiss You are two good examples. [Self-Defense](#) skills are also listed [here](#).

### Warnings

- Keep gas in your car. Be practical and do not take any chances. If you know you are going for a long trip, keep track of your gas and make many stops to fill up.



- Beware of victim blame and rape myths. The only person responsible for an assault is the perpetrator. If you have been assaulted, no matter what you do, or do not do, in any case, it is not your fault.

### Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.ibiblio.org/rcip/vb.html>
2. <http://www.rainn.org>
3. <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/advice/tips/protect-yourself-from-rape-college-campus>
4. <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/sexual-assault-prevention/avoiding-dangerous-situations>
5. <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-offenders>
6. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/10382613/ns/dateline\\_nbc/t/rape-campus/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/10382613/ns/dateline_nbc/t/rape-campus/)
7. <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/sexist/2009/08/10/rape-prevention-tips-stay-inside-or-die-a-horrible-death/>
8. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-social-thinker/200911/why-don-t-we-help-less-is-more-least-when-it-comes-bystanders>
9. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/26/living/colorado-university-rape-prevention-tips/>





## Appendix VII: What to do in Case of Sexual Assault in Costa Rica

- The first and most important thing is to **get to a safe place away from the perpetrator**. This could be a friend's house, police station, hospital, or anywhere else where you are not in danger anymore.
- ***Yell and make noise if you are feeling threatened – anything to call attention to yourself. Yell “Call 911” or “Nueve-uno-uno, llame nueve-uno-uno.” Help is “Auxilio” in Spanish. The words for an assault are “un as alto.”***
- If you cannot get away but can make a phone call, call 911 and explain your location to get security help. – ***necesito ayuda – un asalto al (state the location and town).***

Note: Local police can provide immediate security protection. They are not the proper crime reporting authority. The Organization of Judicial Investigation (OIJ) is the agency to which the crime should be reported.

- **Preserve all physical evidence: do not shower, bathe, douche, wash your hands or brush your teeth. Do not clean or disturb the area where the attack occurred.**
- **Write down as many details about the incident as possible**, including a description of the assailant.
- **Know that what happened is not your fault.** No one has the right to sexually assault, abuse, or harass any other person under any circumstances.

**Remember that you are in Costa Rica which has its own laws and protocols. The official stance of both the Costa Rican authorities and rape crises centers in Costa Rica is to report the crime.**



**In order to report the crime a medical exam is required.**

**If you wish to report the crime, receive medical attention, legal assistance, and counseling: CALL 911, OIJ, or go to the nearest medical facility:**

**OIJ**

**2630-0733 (Puntarenas) / 2645-5992 (Monteverde)**

**Private Hospitals**

**(San José)**

**CIMA 2208-1144 / Católica 2283-6617 / Bíblica 2522-1000**

**Public Hospitals**

**Liberia 2690-2300 / Cartago 2550-1999 / Puntarenas 2663-0133**

**Emergency Clinic**

**Monteverde 2645-6065, 8589-8227**

**Dr. Wander Hernández**

**8589-8227 (Monteverde)**

***As an individual, you have the following options in Costa Rica:***

**REPORT THE CRIME**

**This allows you to also receive medical attention, legal assistance, and/or counseling.**

**Call 911 or get to the nearest medical facility or OIJ office.** This is the branch of the security forces that are authorized to pursue perpetrators and have them enter the judicial system.

- Reporting the crime will entail a **medical exam** by a specialized doctor, a **recounting of the incident** to the OIJ/police, and receiving **medical attention**. Through this process, you will receive emergency contraception, antibiotics, counseling, anti-retrovirals (if deemed necessary), and psychological and legal counseling.
- Specifically, in the Puntarenas, Liberia, and Cartago public hospitals, a protocol is in place where **the assaulted person will recount the incident only one time**.
- In Monteverde, the Institute has contracted a medical doctor, Wander Hernández, to be on call for emergency assistance. **You may call Dr. Wander Hernández at any time to ask for help.** She will assist with your questions, help preserve your clothes as evidence, and find out which hospital has the staff on hand to attend to you.



- Plan B (morning after pill) is now available in Costa Rica. Prescribed emergency contraception is available in the public security system, (Costa Rican Social Security Fund), this medication is also provided by the doctor we work with 24/7, the doctor is licensed in Costa Rica to treat a reported sexual assault.

### **MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ONLY**

**If you want only medical assistance and do not wish to report the crime:**

**Call Dr. Wander Hernández – 8589-8227**

- 1) Explain that you are a visitor to this country and have been assaulted (you can tell her that you are an Institute student if you want to do so).
- 2) Let her know whether you wish to report the crime immediately, perhaps in the future, not at all, or are unsure.
- 3) Let her know that you would like medical assistance.

### **If you do not want medical, legal, or psychological assistance at this time:**

Call an individual that you trust and who will support you. Ask them to keep complete confidentiality and to allow you to make your own decisions. Explain your situation. Remember that only you can make the decision on what to do.

**Your emergency number card lists counselors and psychologists  
who are available to receive calls.**

Read the [Pandora's Project](#): Support and resources for survivors of rape and sexual abuse.

Call a rape crisis hotline, such as 001-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [online.rainn.org](http://online.rainn.org). You can search [www.centers.rainn.org](http://www.centers.rainn.org) for rape crisis centers in different states of the U.S.

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**Remember that you are in Costa Rica which has its own laws and protocols.**

Plan B (morning after pill) is now available in Costa Rica. Prescribed emergency contraception is available in the public security system, (Costa Rican Social Security Fund), this medication is also provided by the doctor we work with 24/7, the doctor is licensed in Costa Rica to treat a reported sexual assault.



**REMEMBER THAT IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT.  
REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN GET THROUGH THIS.**

**Title IX legislation**, in its efforts to reduce discrimination of women, **requires U.S. universities to report all incidences of sexual assault and harassment to their Title IX coordinator**. Therefore, the Monteverde Institute is required by the sending institutions to advise them of any incidences of sexual harassment or assault. MVI staff members must report cases of sexual assault or harassment to the MVI administration.

According to Costa Rican law, the Monteverde Institute has been advised to report the **knowledge of the incident** to the authorities.

NO DETAILS (including names) CAN BE PROVIDED WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT.

All information will be held in confidentiality between all parties.



## EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS BY LOCATION

**NATIONAL EMERGENCY SYSTEM: 911 can be called from anywhere**

### COUNTRY-WIDE

Emergency	911
Poison Control	2233-1028
INS (traffic accident)	800-800-8000
U.S. Embassy	2519-2000

### SANTA ELENA / MONTEVERDE

Clínica de Emergencias	2645-7778 / 8304-2121 / 8391-9290
Clínica Santa Elena	2645-5076 / 2645-5716
Cruz Roja Costarricense	2645-6128
Dr. Wander Hernández	8589-8227 / 2645-6065
Farmacia Vitosí	2645-5004
Police	24 hours: 2645-7074 / general: 2645-6248
OIJ (to report a crime)	2645-5992 (Puntarenas 2630-0377)
Bomberos (fire department)	2645-7512
INS – Monteverde agent	2645-5719

### SAN JOSÉ

Clínica Católica Hospital	2283-6617
Hospital Calderon Guardia	2257-7922
CIMA Hospital	2208-1144
Hospital de Niños	2222-0122
Clínica Bíblica Hospital	2522-1030
Hospital México	2232-6122
Hospital de la Mujer	2257-9111

### HOSPITALS IN OTHER PARTS OF COSTA RICA

\*Pilot program in place for sexual assault victims.

PROVINCE	CITY	PHONE
Alajuela	Ciudad Quesada	2401-1200
Cartago	Cartago*	2550-1999
Guanacaste	Liberia*	2690-2300
Guanacaste	Liberia (CIMA)	2690-8500
Heredia	Sarapiquí (clinic)	2761-0023
Limón	Limón	2758-2222
Limón	Guápiles	2710-6801
Puntarenas	Puntarenas*	2663-0133
Puntarenas	Golfito	2775-7998



## MONTEVERDE INSTITUTE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (ERT)

**Call ERT members in the following order until you make contact**

Depending on the type and degree of emergency, the contacted person will consult with at least one other person on the team. When necessary, all team members will be consulted.

**NATIONAL EMERGENCY SYSTEM: 911 can be called from anywhere**

ERT MEMBER	TITLE/SPECIALTY	HOME TEL.	MOBILE TEL.
<b>Estela Coghi</b> <b>(First Contact)</b>	MVI Academic Assistant, WAFA (Wilderness Advanced First Aid)	N/A	8710-0141
<b>Lilliam Zúñiga</b> <b>(Second Contact)</b>	MVI Academic Assistant, WAFA	N/A	8355-7690
<b>Alexandra Paniagua</b> <b>(Third Contact)</b>	Academic Director, WAFA, WFR (Wilderness First Responder)	N/A	8818-2269
<b>Fern Perkins</b> <b>(Fourth Contact)</b>	Executive Director, WAFA, WFR	2645-7150	8658-8770
<b>Wander Hernández</b>	Medical doctor	N/A	8589-8227/ 2645-6065
<b>Melania Rojas Rodriguez</b>	Crisis management Psychology Graduate and Holistic Energy Therapist	N/A	8510-9020
<b>Harriet Joslin</b>	Crisis management, clinical social worker	2645-7043	N/A
<b>Angie Kubin</b>	Licensed Psychologist		8391-9339
<b>Marco Retana</b>	Attorney at law	2222-9566	8387-1068