

# **COSTA RICA HEALTH AND SAFETY AT A GLANCE**

## **Safety Policies**

The Costa Rica Center takes the health and security of students very seriously, and this is a priority in all the academic activities. However due to the nature of the program, students must also take this very seriously and make responsible decisions to minimize their risk of facing a health or safety incident. The following policies are in place in order to try to minimize this risk and also to know your whereabouts in case of an emergency.

In case of sickness or any kind of health or safety emergency (or any other issue), students should always contact the Student Services Coordinator. He/she will assist you as to how to proceed and will accompany you when necessary for translation, transportation and moral support. The health system in Costa Rica provides easy access to hospitals (public and private) and medical centers in the entire country. For most health problems, we will make an appointment with a local doctor in Heredia who can refer the student to a specialist if it is necessary. Students have been visiting the same doctor, who speaks perfect English, for the last three years.

## **Safety Considerations for Field Work**

The advisor and Safety Coordinator will determine the safety of students' field projects based on: U.S. State Department travel advisories, direct communication with contacts in the area and recent media reports about an area. Whenever a region is considered unsafe or dangerous, the advisor and the student will search for an alternative project which meets the learning objectives of the student. If a project is considered unsafe and nonetheless the student decides to go on that project after being informed of the potential risk, disciplinary action may be taken as defined by LIU policy. This may include suspension from the College.

## **Emergency Procedures**

If a travel warning is issued, students will be evacuated from the country in due course once it is safe to do so. We encourage all students to subscribe to the U.S. Department of State Travel Warnings (DOSTRAVEL) electronic mailing list by sending an email to: [listserv@lists.state.gov](mailto:listserv@lists.state.gov) type in the message body "SUBSCRIBE DOSTRAVEL YOURNAME" (omit the quotation marks and leave subject blank). You can also use the online subscription form at: [www.state.gov/www/listervs/cms.html](http://www.state.gov/www/listervs/cms.html). In addition, students are given an emergency card that they should carry at all times in Costa Rica with emergency numbers. The Costa Rica Center has a permanent Emergency Team that the students can contact 24 hours a day for any kind of emergency.

The Global College Program Costa Rica Center is registered with the U.S. Department of State. Students are also required to individually register their passports with the U.S. Department of State prior to departure or immediately after arrival and to provide a copy of their passport information to the Academic Director. Students should also fill out their local address in Costa Rica on page five of the passport in pencil. If you leave the city of Heredia you must take the original passport with you. It is good practice to keep a copy of your passport and entry stamp with you when you travel and in a separate bag from your wallet in case your passport is lost in transit.

## Recreational Travel

Because our students frequently travel independently, it is very important that a system be in place which alerts the College when a student may be in jeopardy or if the student needs to be apprised of an emergency situation. For this reason, students are required to provide the Center with local contact information: local address and phone number where they can be reached, as well as the name and contact information of a neighbor or friend who is likely to know their whereabouts in case of emergency. This is also important as occasionally we receive calls from parents who need to contact their sons and daughters immediately about family emergencies or other family issues. For this reason, we encourage students to always keep their families back home aware of their plans as well as provide them with contact information also.

Students traveling during weekends must fill out a form with the information of the place he or she is going, the hotel name and telephone number and the day of return. This should be submitted before travel to the Health and Safety Coordinator. If a group of students is traveling they can fill out a group form. **For their own safety, students are not permitted to travel to countries with State Dept. travel advisories or to areas with high health or safety risks even if such travel is for recreational purposes and/or during semester breaks. If a student travels to one of those countries she/he will be automatically out of the Program.**

## Basic Safety Issues

Following are some basic safety tips for travel in any foreign country. The best thing to keep in mind is your own common sense. This will keep you safe when many other things fail.

- Carry only enough cash for the day, especially when you have just visited a bank or ATM.
- Distribute money so it is in two places, i.e. some in your purse with the rest in a money pouch concealed under your garments.
- If you carry a wallet, it should go in your front pants pocket. Be especially careful in crowds and on the buses.
- Keep your luggage, shoulder bag or backpack with you at all times upon arrival in an airport or bus station. Always wrap the strap around your arm or leg if sitting down at a table or on a park bench. Thieves are both quick and clever.
- When going out in the evening, always travel with a companion. Women may find it easier to go out, especially to clubs/bars, with a male companion.
- When you feel uncomfortable or are uneasy about your surroundings, trust your feeling and move on. Stay on well-lighted and populated streets.
- Beware of the fast, aggressive drivers in the narrow streets and always take care crossing the street. Pedestrians do not have right of way.
- Avoid illegal drugs. You are subject to the laws of the country in which you are traveling.
- Make two copies of your important documents and carry one set in your suitcase. Leave the other set at home with your family.
- Have phone numbers to call if credit cards/traveler's checks (cheques) are stolen or lost.
- Put your name and address on your camera – inside and out. Mark yours so it is easily identified by others.

Remember to immediately notify the police of all losses or other serious incidents. Get a copy of the official police report. You may need it later for insurance purposes/claims. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Most insurance policies do not reimburse for lost paper, i.e. cash; replacing passports and visas, travel tickets, student passes.

## **Dugs (Drogas)**

Many U.S. citizens traveling abroad believe that as US citizens they are immune from prosecution under local law and that buying or carrying small amounts of drugs cannot result in arrest. In fact, U.S. Americans abroad have been jailed for possessing as little as three grams- that's a tenth of an ounce- of marijuana. Realize that, when abroad, you are subject to the jurisdiction of all local laws. Also know that drug pushers, after making profit on the sale of drugs, may turn customers in to the local authorities for a reward. Travelers who, for medical reasons, are required to take a drug that may be subject to suspicion should carry their prescriptions with them in their original containers.

## **Health/Medical Information**

Healthcare in Costa Rica is very good. Life expectancy is among the highest in the world. There are many clinics and hospitals, both public and private, and they are considerably less expensive than comparable care in the United States. The center keeps a list of health care professionals who have been able to provide care for our students in the past, including psychologists, doctors, dentists and gynecologists.

## **Mandatory International Health Insurance**

Students will receive their health insurance cards and a policy handbook upon their arrival to the Costa Rica center. The mandatory international health insurance fee will be automatically applied to a student's tuition bill. All students will be charged for international health regardless if they are covered under a parent's policy. The fee for 2008-2009 is \$275 per semester. It is important to emphasize that except for long term hospitalization; students must pay out of pocket, and then submit a claim to the insurance company for reimbursement. The percentage covered and deductibles are outlined in the policy handbook: <https://secure.visit-aci.com/Documents/BR32201388.pdf>. In other words, it is important to bring some extra money (credit cards also work fine) to cover any medical emergency.

## **Immunizations**

Information on immunizations and other health-related topics are given here as a guide, not as authoritative medical advice. You should, of course, have a basic checkup and talk to your doctor before you come, and provide Admissions (for new students) or the Registrar (for continuing students) with all appropriate paperwork.

You or your physician should check with the Center for Disease Control for the most current update on the region you are traveling to. Their web page is <http://www.cdc.gov/>. If you want updated information from the U. S. State Department on the country you are traveling to, check <http://travel.state.gov/>.

When you see your doctor, tell him or her that you will be living in Costa Rica for several months and visiting rural and urban areas of Costa Rica and other Central American countries, probably including Nicaragua, Ecuador and perhaps others. If you plan to do any traveling after the end of the semester or year, be sure to mention where you will be headed so that you can take care of that as well.

Costa Rica only requires you to have the yellow fever vaccination when returning from certain countries, including Ecuador, although your doctor or other sources may recommend certain

ones. It is recommended that you get a Hepatitis A shot (Immune Globulin). This gives your immune system a boost while your body gets used to the different food, water, etc. Hepatitis B and Typhoid shots are also recommended.

Make sure your vaccinations are updated, so you are as well protected as possible. If you have any health problems, please go to your doctor and get a full treatment before arriving to the Costa Rica Center. It is a good idea to get the "flu shot", especially if you are coming for fall semester because it is the rainy season.

We take the health situation into account when planning field trips, and have never had serious problems. Malaria does exist in Central America, but we do not spend time in malaria endemic areas and do not consider it necessary for students to take anti-malarial drugs because of the side effects. If you should decide that you do want to take them, talk to your physician about it.

Most people's inoculations are not up to date. Check with your doctor to see if you need boosters for Diphtheria, Tetanus, Poliomyelitis, Measles, Rubella, Mumps or Chicken pox. All inoculations and immunizations should be recorded in the yellow booklet called "International Certificates of Vaccination."

It is recommended that you have a tuberculin skin test while still in the United States. Assuming this test is negative, it should be repeated on your return to the States. If you are a woman and you are on the Pill, you should bring enough to last through the semester or year. Birth control pills are available over the counter in Costa Rica, but not all kinds or all brands are available. Condoms are easily available.

You can drink the water in Heredia, San José and the surrounding areas. If you travel to rural areas, you should definitely not drink the water. Bottled water is available everywhere.

### **AIDS Awareness**

AIDS (SIDA) is still on the rise in Costa Rica. Heterosexual infection is increasing faster than homosexual infection. There is no such thing as a high-risk group – there is only high risk behavior. The heterosexual population of Costa Rica has been slow to adapt their behavior to protect themselves from the ever-increasing risk. Using a condom protects against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, but is never a guarantee. Please take the necessary precautions to avoid becoming infected with this or any STD.

### **Help Available in the United States**

The Citizens Emergency Center in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs provides emergency services relating to the welfare of Americans arrested or detained abroad, searches for Americans missing overseas, transmission of emergency messages for Americans to their next of kin and transfer of private funds to US posts abroad for delivery to destitute Americans. Assistance at the Citizens Emergency Center is available Monday through Friday from 8:15 am to 10:00 pm at (202)-647-9019.

For Overseas American Citizen Services in the United States call (202)-647-7899. If calling from overseas dial (888) 407-4747 or on a regular toll line dial (317) 472-2328.