

# UNIBE: A Handbook

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ADVICE FROM FORMER STUDENTS

UPDATED 4/2/2018



# About the Republic of Costa Rica

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San Jose is located in the Central Valley, and is one of the most educated and safest cities in central America.

The economy is heavily reliant on agriculture and tourism.

Other exports include bananas, pineapples, coffee, electronics, and medical equipment.

It is a democratic government, without a military.



# About Costa Rica cont'd

Median income = \$12,000/year

20.5% poverty rate

Unemployment rate = 8.1%

Major host of Columbian and Nicaraguan refugees

95% Literacy rate

In Costa Rica there are two seasons:

- Rainy season: May-December
- Dry season: January-April



Freshly squeezed orange juice sold on the streets of Costa Rica

# About Costa Rica cont'd

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Population = 4.9 million

- 83.5% Mestizo / white
- 6.7% Mulattoes
- 2.4% Native American
- 1.1% Afro-Caribbean / black
- 1.1% other

Religion

- 70.5% Catholicism
- 13.8% Protestantism
- 11.3% irreligion
- 4.3% Other



(Manuel Antonio National  
Park)



Chocolate Tour



# About the culture

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You will notice police cars keep their lights on. This is because Costa Ricans believe the police should not “hide” from the people.

The catholic church plays a very large role in all aspects of daily life, including health care.

- Very little separation between church & state



# About the culture cont'd

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Organ and tissue donation is rare but the policy is changing in part due to the church's role of encouraging families to allow their loved ones to help others live a longer life

Law prohibits smoking in public (streets, bus stops, restaurants, bars, etc.)

# About the culture cont'd

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“Tico Time” is a term used to describe the laid back lifestyle. For example, if you’re scheduled to meet at 1:00 PM you may not actually meet at 1:00 PM. The sooner you can learn to embrace this and go with the flow, the more you’ll enjoy the experience.

Many ID numbers are public knowledge. They do not have an understanding of a Social Security or Passport number that should be secret.



# About the culture cont'd

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It is very family oriented so your host family will feel very protective and responsible for you

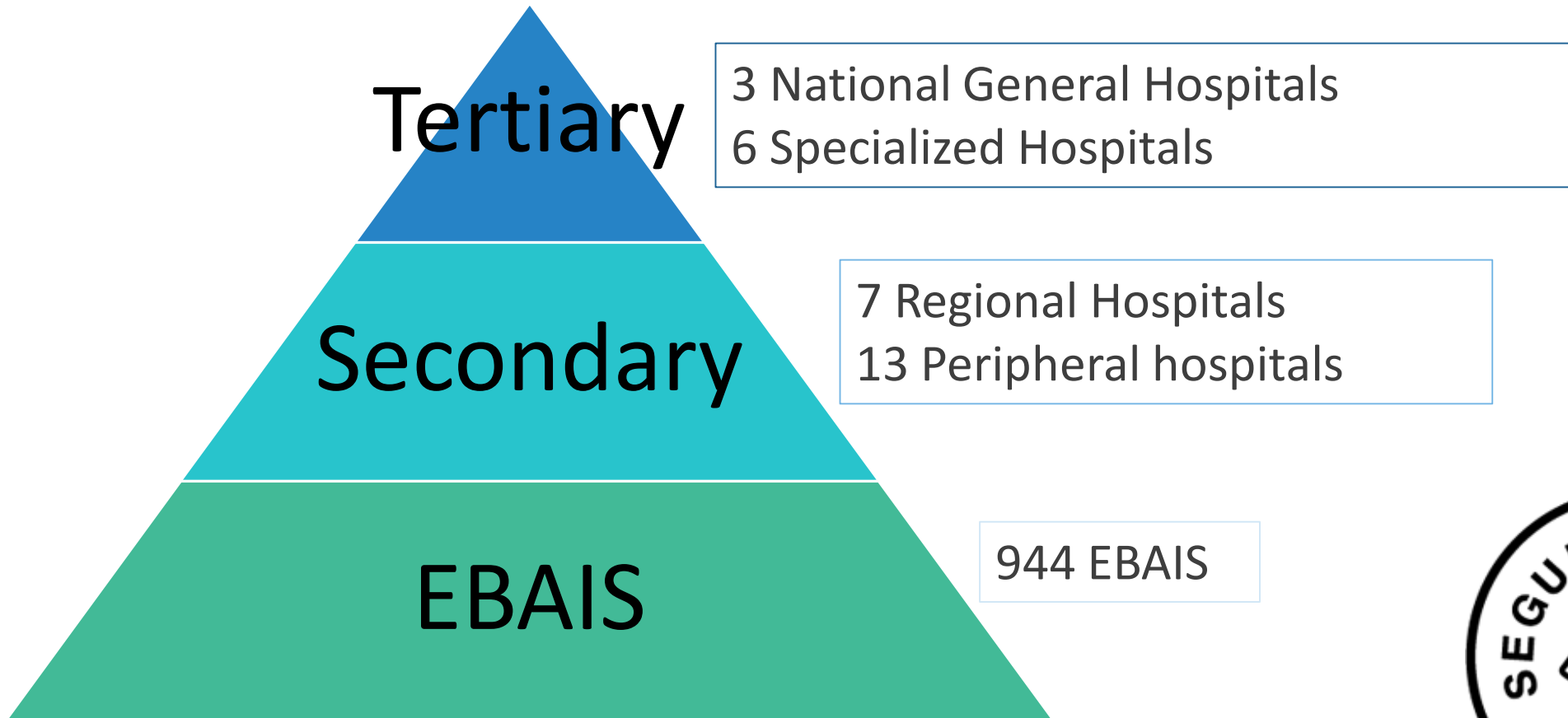
Do your best to practice Spanish– the effort is always appreciated!

“Pura Vida” is a common phrase, used as a greeting, when in agreement, and when saying goodbye. It means “pure life” and epitomizes the laid back culture of Costa Rica





# Public Healthcare System



# About Costa Rica's Healthcare System

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## Public Health Insurance

- Pros = free visits and medications
- Cons = not as much choice which clinic you can go to

## Private care is an option

Many Costa Ricans select a combination of social system & private care/insurance

## Three tier system

- Tier 1 = EBAIS (see next slide)
- Tier 2 = Regional hospitals
- Tier 3 = National / specialized hospitals



# More on Tier 1

## ETAPS

- A community outreach program where technicians visit every house in Costa Rica 1-3 times / year
- Update health log books and vaccinations
- Check for new members of the community and their level of health

## EBAIS

- Community clinic that functions as a primary care clinic
- Every region of Costa Rica has their own EBAIS clinic and ETAPS team that takes care of the people within it.





# Healthcare system cont'd

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Physicians are considered public employees/public servants.

Many surgeries have long waiting lists (sometimes 1-2 years) – usually must arrive early in the morning to wait in line to be considered for elective surgeries since surgeons are busy with urgent / emergent cases.

There are also long waits for other procedures and for equipment repairs.

# Healthcare system cont'd

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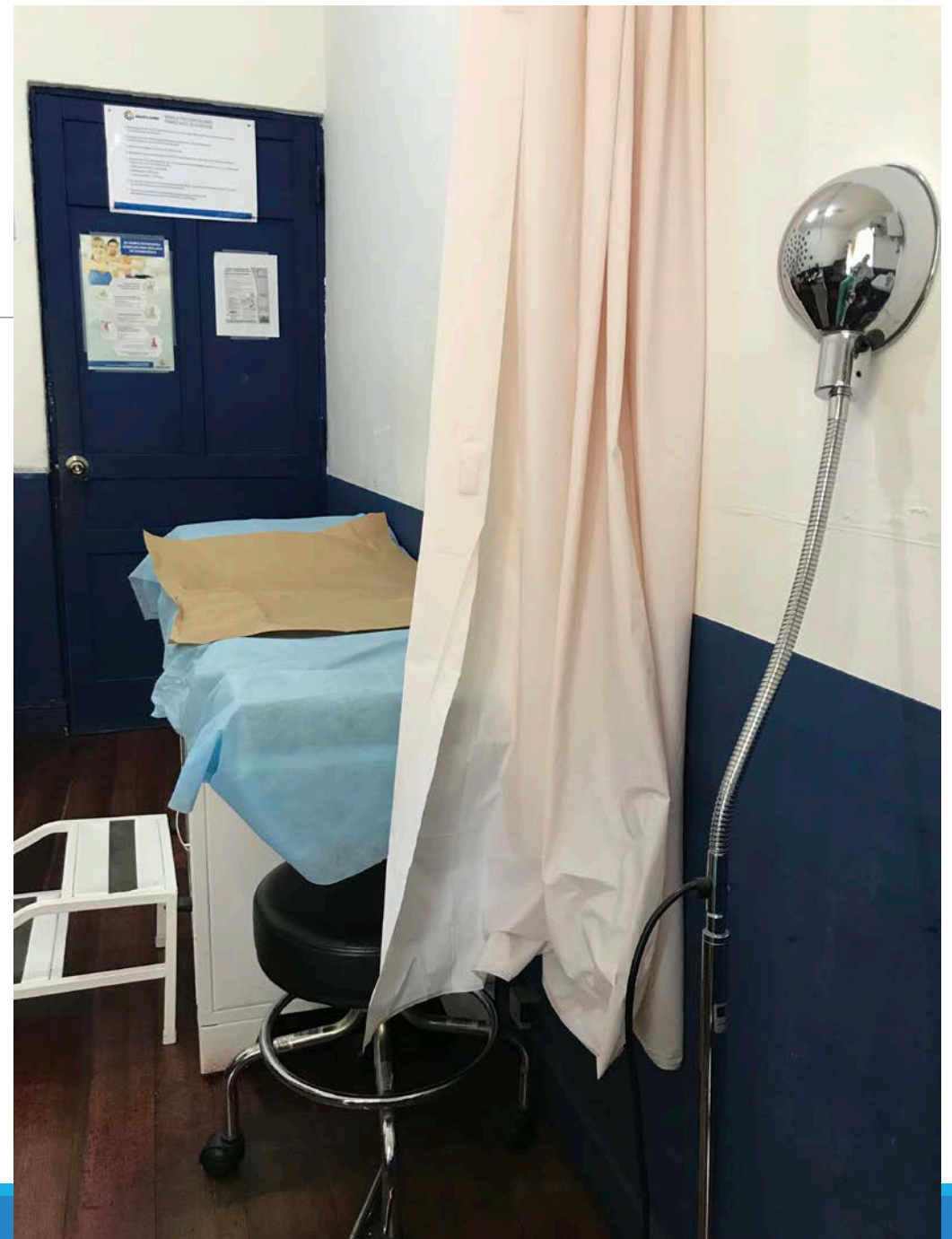
Medical school is 5-6 years (depending on whether students attend a private or public university).

Residency programs are not required to practice primary care medicine, but are required for any specialty.

Only 5-6 hospitals in Costa Rica can host residents.

Resident spots do not open yearly, and you must complete two exams within desired specialty before application to residency.

Residency is *extremely* competitive (up to 300 applicants per spot).



# Healthcare system cont'd

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There are no EMTs in Costa Rica. Red Cross volunteers serve in this capacity and bring patients to the Tier 2 clinics. Red Cross volunteers are not allowed to treat patients with medications during transport.

Private companies with trained EMTs can be used by clinics to transport patients to Tier 3 hospitals and they are certified to give medications.

Abortions are illegal.

There is a severe shortages of specialists.

There are very few CT scanners in the country.





## Shaman Experience

20,000 indigenous peoples living in Costa Rica before Spanish influence, those remaining visit a shaman for medical needs.

Goal is to solve physical and spiritual ailments using natural remedies.



# Before your departure

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Work with the Office of Global Health to complete the pre-departure requirements.

Download WhatsApp to your phone. This will be the main method of communication with UNIBE while in Costa Rica.

Make payment to UNIBE for the program fee.

- UNIBE will send an invoice. The invoice must be paid through a wire transfer.
- NOTE: if your bank charges a fee to process the wire transfer, this fee should be added to the amount of the invoice. The invoice amount is for the program fee only and does not include transaction fees.

# Before your departure

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Obtain \$150-\$200/week in cash

- If you only do the 2 week trip, you will not have a free weekend for personal trips. As such, less money is needed.
- All meals, transportation, and housing are paid for while you are in San Jose, so during the week you only need money for things like shopping, extra food, etc.
- Weekend excursions are out of pocket, and cost depends on what exactly you will be doing and how many people will be going. \$150 – \$200 should cover most excursions.





# Before your departure cont'd

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## Immunizations

- None required. Recommended vaccinations include:
- Typhoid
- Hepatitis A (most Americans received this as a childhood vaccine)

## Other health considerations:

- Protect against Chikungunya & Dengue Fever with bug spray with DEET especially on excursions [ex: Shaman experience, chocolate tour, beaches]

# What to pack - Clothing

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Scrubs are appropriate clinical attire

- Inappropriate clinical attire includes: jeans, sleeveless shirts, spaghetti straps, skirts, shorts, sandals
- A dress or nice slacks will be needed for the farewell dinner
- NOTE: UNIBE will provide a white coat

Comfortable walking shoes and socks for clinic & weekend excursions

Casual clothes for weekends and evenings

- Outside of the clinic: athletic wear, shorts, etc. (please note: custom is to be conservative in your dress)

Hiking clothes / Hiking shoes (depends on the weekend excursions)

Light jacket or sweater (nights can be rather chilly, especially in San Jose or the beach)

Pajamas (consider you may share a hotel with your classmates on weekend trips)

Comfortable pants

Rain jacket, poncho, or umbrella that can be easily carried then folded and put away when not in use.

# What to pack cont.

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Stethoscope

Hat / Sunglasses

Sunscreen and aloe (extremely important for the beach and anything with higher elevation like volcanos, etc.)

Swimsuit(s), beach towel

Bug repellent containing DEET

## Medications

- Any prescription medications
- Allergy medicine, if applicable
- Ibuprofen/Tylenol/etc.
- Antidiarrheal/constipation meds.
  - Remember, traveling to a new country with a new diet can easily upset one's stomach.



# What to pack cont.

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## Miscellaneous

- Toiletries
- Melatonin
- Extra glasses / contact lenses / solution
- First aid kit
- Motion sickness medications (especially if you get easily car sick!!).

Small gift for your host family

Daypack

Water bottle

Hand sanitizer

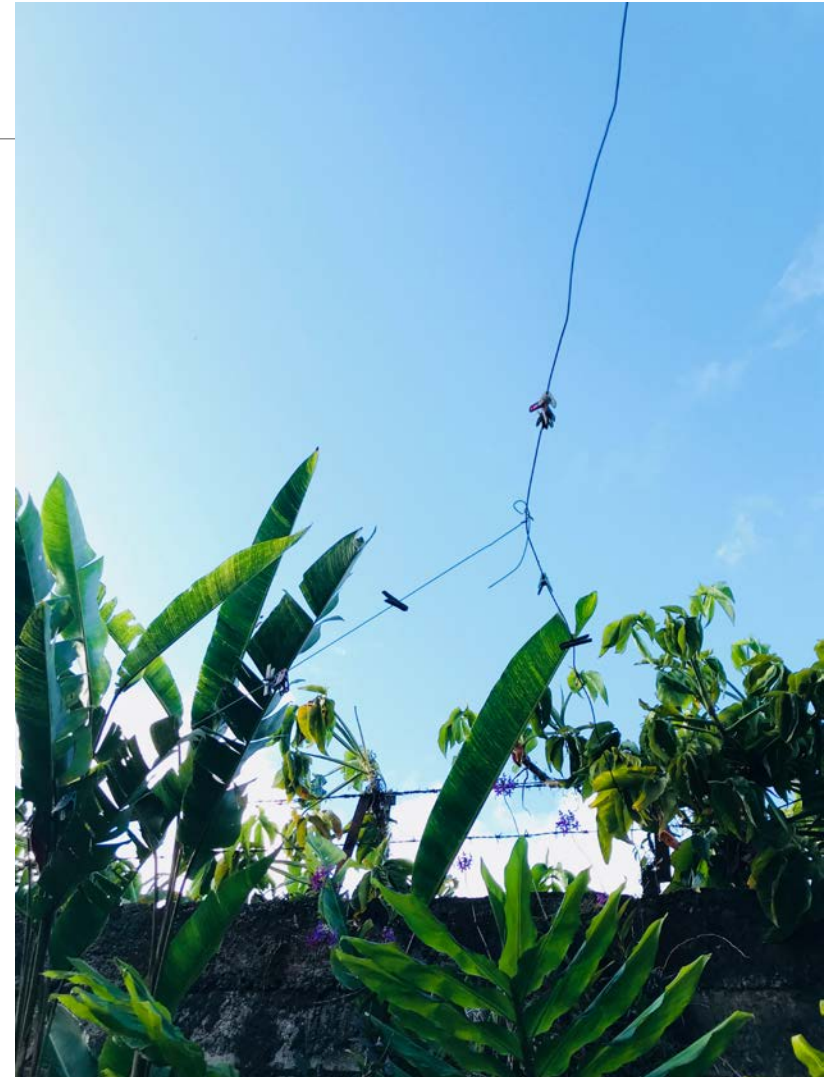
# Arriving in Costa Rica

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The airport is very modern and easy to navigate. Have the address of UNIBE and your passport in hand as you enter customs.

UNIBE will pick you up when you arrive. They will be waiting outside the airport holding a UNIBE sign. Beware of hustlers trying to encourage you to take their taxis.

After picking you up from the airport, UNIBE will drop you off with your host family where you can relax until Sunday when orientation starts.



# Homestay / Host Families

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Most families are retired individuals who have been recommended to UNIBE.

The homestay includes:

- Private room
- Shared or private bath
- Wi-Fi
- Breakfast & dinner
  - Lunch is at UNIBE
- Laundry service
- Cleaning service

Students are assigned to host homes based on availability.

- 1-3 students per home





# Homestay / Host Families cont'd

You will be provided a key to the home.

Rules may vary by host family based on their level of comfort.

- You MUST respect your host family's rules

Allow your host family to call a cab for you if you want to go out in the evening.

The only guests allowed at your host home are other students from the same program & you must make arrangements beforehand.

- No local guests

Curfew:

- Midnight on weekdays
- Weekends are negotiable (just make sure you communicate with your host family)



# Homestay / Host Families cont'd

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Out of respect for your host family, please keep them up to date on your coming & going and let them know ASAP if your plans will change (including if you are running late). They will worry about you and it is common courtesy to let them know if you won't be home when expected. They spend a lot of time preparing time-sensitive meals for you and “tico time” often interferes with that.

Your host family may or may not speak English. Even if they do, use this time as additional Spanish practice.



# In-country finances

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The colon is the currency of Costa Rica.

You will need to convert currency, although U.S. dollars are accepted in some places.

UNIBE will make arrangements for the group to exchange money after your arrival. This will ensure that you get the best exchange value. Be sure to bring photo identification with you any time you exchange money.

Avoid over-converting!

- Although you can convert leftover colones to USD before returning to the U.S., you will lose quite a bit of money doing so.

Credit cards are accepted in many places and ATMs are also available.

A lot of the Costa Rican currency is in coins, so consider packing a small coin purse.





# In-country communication

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## Phones

- UNIBE will take students to purchase a phone if you want an in-country phone.
  - Approximately \$25 + paying for minutes
  - Former students suggested purchasing an international cell phone plan as opposed to purchasing a local phone. The cost is about the same.

## Wi-Fi

- Provided at the home stay.
- Available throughout San Jose but not at most clinics or restaurants.

## Communication Apps

- WhatsApp is the main form of communication used by UNIBE.
  - **NOTE: It must be downloaded before departing the U.S. using a confirmation code. This will allow you to keep your cell data off while abroad.**

NOTE: phones are not allowed at hospital or clinic sites.



# Rotation opportunities

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## Typical 2 week program

- Week 1: EBAIS primary care clinics
- Week 2: Hospital Calderon Guardia rotating among specialties (OB/GYN, Derm, Physical Therapy, Geriatrics)



## Typical 4 week program

- Week 1: Hospital Calderon Guardia rotating between aforementioned specialties
- Week 2: EBAIS primary care clinics
- Week 3: Coronado secondary clinic rotating among primary care, ER, small “surgery”, and psychiatry
- Week 4: Day Care Center for the Elderly and La Carpio

# Clinic

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Your role in clinic will primarily be shadowing. There are cases in which you will be asked to do the physical exam, pelvic exam, etc. Costa Rican healthcare overall is pretty good so a lot of the patients being seen are for reasons like hypertension, diabetes, lower back pain.

They will talk about this during orientation, but a good rule of thumb is to go in *not* expecting to educate or make significant changes to the established practices. Some may strike you as odd (no HIPPA laws, a disregard for hand washing) but it is not your place as a foreign student to try to change this.



# Spanish Class

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Spanish class takes place every other day, either MWF or TTh, for two hours. The first class will include a test of your Spanish ability and the last class a final exam. There will be homework, but don't worry, it's not too time consuming! Use this as an opportunity to learn colloquial and medical phrases. Be aware that terms used in Mexico or Spain can have different connotations in Costa Rica.



# Day-to-Day

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6:30-7:30 – Picked up from homes

8:00 – Arrive at EBAIS/Hospital

10:30-11:00 – Leave for lunch

11:30-1:00 – Lunch

1:00-4:30 – Spanish class

4:30-5:00 – Dropped off at homes



# Food

The most common food is “casado” which means marriage. It consists of beans, rice, salad, and a meat (most often chicken, fish, or beef). Because these items are served together so often, they are considered “married.” It will be available almost everywhere you eat and is a safe bet.

Soups, salads, and other types of food are also available.

There are many different types of fresh juices available, including many flavors that you can only find in Costa Rica.





# Transportation

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Transportation during the week for clinic, lunch, and Spanish class is provided by UNIBE via a personal driver. The drivers speak English very well and are great advocates. However if you want to go somewhere to sight see, to travel for the weekend, go shopping during the week, etc. – you need to find your own transportation. Taxis are safe and easy to use. Uber exists in Costa Rica but is technically illegal, however it is safe and easy to use as it is here in USA. Keep in mind, if using an Uber, one person should sit in the front seat to decrease suspicion. Buses are not a super option because of theft, so please consult someone at UNIBE before booking a bus ticket.

# Personal Excursions

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If there is something you really want to do while visiting Costa Rica, just ask. UNIBE is very accommodating and can help you make appropriate arrangements for any personal excursions.

If the group wishes to schedule additional personal experiences, visit the following website:

<http://www.costaricaguides.com/>

- UNIBE utilizes this company for all weekend excursions. Groups are welcome to select additional excursions which UNIBE will be happy to arrange.
- Personal excursions are at an additional cost.



# Other Experiences

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Visit to La Carpio – a well-known poor neighborhood in Costa Rica

Poas Volcano National Park– a beautiful national park with a volcano

Jade Museum – a museum that showcases the history of Costa Rica and the use of jade

Baldi Hot Springs – a water park built around hot springs (a wonderful place to relax)

Zip Line through the canopy – zip line through the rainforest of Costa Rica

Chocolate Tour– located in the rainforest (This is a great cultural opportunity. If you get to do it, beware of the mosquitoes and heavily spray with insect repellent before this adventure!)

White water river rafting

Manual Antonio National Park



# Volcanos

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Poas Volcano

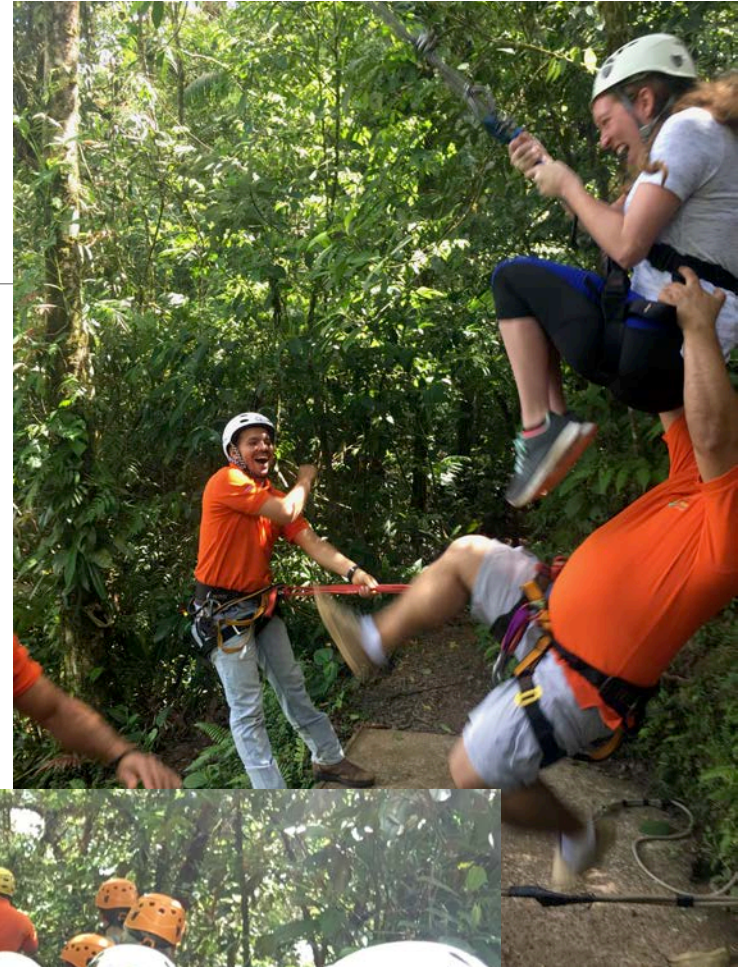


Irazu Volcano



# Zip Lining

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# White water rafting

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# Puerto Viejo

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# Baldi Hot Springs

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# Tips & suggestions from former students

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Bring a few good books.

You might also consider packing a card game or board game to share with the group and your host family.

Be careful walking around. There are lots of potholes...

It is recommended to download “SpanishDict” app on your phone - it is a helpful Spanish – English dictionary that doesn’t need Wi-Fi to translate.

Converters are not needed unless your chargers have 3 prongs. Outlets in Costa Rica are two pronged only.

Be vocal about what you want out of the rotation and let UNIBE know if there is a certain aspect you want included in the rotation (e.g., hospital/clinic/surgery/etc.) so they can help make the arrangements.

Taxis are a somewhat costly mode of transportation, but your host family will be happy to call and make arrangements for you.

There are bus stations available to take you on any excursions you may want to plan for yourself (ex: Puntarenas).

Uber is easy and safe to use, but is technically illegal in Costa Rica. If you use it, make sure someone sits in the front seat to reduce suspicion.



# UNIBE contact information

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# References & resources

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Country-specific information: International SOS

- <https://www.internationalsos.com/> (log in using the TTUHSC member ID: 11BCAS562346)

Country-specific information: Department of State

- <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/costa-rica.html>

Lonely Planet: Costa Rica

- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/costa-rica>



**Have  
fun!**

