

Sustainability and Culture in Costa Rica

Instructors

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PhD (ongoing)

Email

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Office Hours

Office hours are available upon request. Please email the instructor to set up a meeting.

Course Delivery

Virtual - Asynchronous (15 hr)

Virtual - Synchronous (2 hr)

Mandatory travel component to San José, Costa Rica (28 hr)

Course Equivalency

45 contact hours, 3 credits

Course Dates

Virtual Dates:
Jan 20 - Feb 20, 2025
(15 hours asynchronous learning)

In-Person Dates:
Feb 22 - Mar 2, 2025

Course Overview

This course explores the intersection of sustainability and culture in Costa Rica, a global leader in environmental innovation. Through virtual sessions and immersive experiences in Costa Rica, students will engage with local experts, businesses, and communities, focusing on sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and conservation efforts. The course fosters an understanding of how cultural heritage and environmental stewardship are intertwined in Costa Rican society, with students reflecting on their role in promoting sustainability and cultural preservation.

Course Prerequisites

None, introductory course

General Course Objectives

Studying abroad is one of the best ways to develop cross-cultural skills and global awareness. This course will push you out of your comfort zone to see the world, yourself, and what you know about sustainability from a new perspective. Through class discussions, readings, media, assignments, guest lectures, and field trips, you will learn about Costa Rica's sustainability practices and culture while being challenged to take another look at your own culture, habits, and beliefs. Students completing this course will be able to:

- Understand the principles of sustainability and how they apply to Costa Rica's environmental policies and practices.
- Analyze the role of culture in shaping sustainable development efforts, particularly in rural communities.
- Critically assess the environmental impact of various industries (e.g., agriculture, tourism) and the strategies used for conservation and sustainability.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Costa Rica's sustainable tourism initiatives.
- Engage in experiential learning activities that deepen understanding of sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and community-driven conservation.
- Develop reflective insights on their personal role in fostering sustainability.



Attendance Policy & Course Expectations

Experiential learning requires a high level of ambition, commitment, and engagement. Participation expectations may be higher than what you are accustomed to.

- Because of the condensed nature of this course, attendance is mandatory at all in-person class meetings and site visits. If you need to miss a class due to sickness, you must obtain permission from the course lecturer and program leader (a doctor's note may be required as well). Unexcused absences may result in a grade deduction. Please arrive early to all class meetings, as punctuality is vital to maximizing our time together.
- All asynchronous classwork is to be completed prior to arrival in Costa Rica.
- All reading assignments are to be read before class.
- Students are expected to show active engagement with lectures, class discussions, and site visits. Local experts and guest speakers should be shown the utmost respect. During tours and site visits, students should be active listeners and always stay with the group. All devices such as laptops, phones, and tablets are NOT permitted during class time unless you have express permission from the instructors.
- Students are expected to carry their journals with them during all site visits. Use your journal to take extensive notes (writing down questions, observations, ideas, and conversations) to help you retain details and explore connections.

Course Evaluation

Grades are not curved. The following grading scale will be used to determine final course grades:

Numeric Grade	Letter Grade	Description
90-100	A	Excellent
80-89	B	Above average
70-79	C	Average
60-69	D	Marginal Pass
Below 60	F	Failure

Academic Integrity Policy

Integrity is important in this course. As your instructor, I will deal with each student fairly and honestly. As students, you are expected to do your own work on all tests and assignments unless it is indicated that collaboration is allowed on a specific assignment. Penalties for integrity violations will range from failure on the assignment involved to failure in the course.



Students Requiring Accommodations

Any student with a documented disability who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations should complete the GLP Accommodations form, provided through VIA as a pre-departure form. You may request a one-on-one meeting with me to further discuss your academic accommodations and how I can support you to succeed in this course.

ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS**Virtual: Reflection Assignments – 25%**

Throughout the virtual component of the course, you will submit weekly written reflections and/or comments on assignments (readings, videos, peer responses, etc.). These reflections should demonstrate your understanding of the material, as well as your ability to critically analyze how Costa Rican culture and sustainability efforts relate to the broader global context. You are encouraged to connect the course content to your own experiences and perceptions. These reflections will help deepen your engagement with the topics and with your peers before your arrival in Costa Rica.

Due Date: Every Friday by 11:59 PM (Jan 20 - Feb 20, 2025) via Classroom

Virtual: Group Project – 20%

Start getting to know each other before you travel together! In groups of 3-4, you'll be completing one of these two proposed projects, or if neither of these interests you, propose another project to me before Feb 1 for approval.

Option 1: Your group will research a specific sustainable practice in Costa Rica (e.g., renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, etc.) and compare it to a similar practice in your home country. You should compare the effectiveness, cultural significance, and challenges of these practices in both countries. Final project to be shared via Classroom in an engaging format (i.e. video, multimedia, infographic, etc.)

Option 2: Your group will design a sustainable tourism initiative aimed at promoting eco-friendly travel while preserving local culture in a specific Costa Rican region (e.g., San José, La Fortuna, or Nicoya). The project should include plans for reducing environmental impact, supporting local communities, and educating tourists on local sustainability efforts. Final project to be shared via Classroom in an engaging format (i.e. video, multimedia, infographic, etc.)

Due Date: Friday, Feb 14, 2025 by 9 PM via Classroom

Virtual & In-Country: Participation & Engagement – 20%

Learning happens best in the community. It is absolutely necessary for each person to commit to full participation in all activities required by the instructors. Students will be graded on their class participation. This includes virtual and in-person class settings, group trips, site visits, lectures, and group meetings. Your grade may be impacted with a lack of active participation and contributions to the learning environment associated with this course. Ultimately, this portion of the grade is based on subjective evaluations of your effort, aptitude and attitude toward the course and the assignments.

Virtual & In-Country: Cultural Exchange Project – 25%

While in Costa Rica, you will have ample opportunities to engage with the local community. To ensure that your engagement with the community is intentional and respectful, you will design a detailed plan outlining a proposed exchange activity, including the goals of this exchange. While in Costa Rica, you will put this plan into action, and from the interaction, deliver a cultural product (something tangible created by you, such as



a video, presentation, craft, etc.) that showcases this exchange. Students will also be asked to write a reflection on the exchange’s outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Due: Plan - Feb 7, 2025 via Classroom; Product - March 15, 2025 via Classroom

In-Country: Sustainability Action Plan – 10%

As an individual or in a group, you will develop a sustainability action plan focused on addressing a specific environmental or social issue in your community (house, college/university, town, neighborhood, etc.) or promoting sustainability in your community or personal life.

Due: March 15, 2025 via Classroom

In-Country: Reflection Presentation – 10%

At the end of the in-country component, you will present your findings and reflections in a final presentation. The presentation should highlight what was learned about Costa Rican culture, sustainability, and the challenges or successes in the areas explored during the program. You will also reflect on how your experience abroad has shaped your understanding of identity, culture, and sustainability.

Due: Feb 28, 2025 via in-person presentation

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Adaptability and flexibility are vital. Due to the nature of this program, the following schedule is subject to change.

Week	Subject	Assignments	Activity/ Site Visit
Virtual Week 1 Jan 20-24	<i>Introduction to Sustainability and Costa Rica</i>	Reflection assignment <i>*Recommended: first group project meeting</i>	Check Classroom for required reading and videos
Virtual Week 2 Jan 27-31	<i>The Role of Culture in Environmental Practices</i>	Reflection assignment <i>*Recommended: second group project meeting</i>	Check Classroom for required reading and videos
Virtual Week 3 Feb 3-7	<i>Sustainable Agriculture in Costa Rica</i>	Reflection assignment Cultural exchange plan due	Check Classroom for required reading and videos
Virtual Week 4 Feb 10-14	<i>Ecotourism</i>	Reflection assignment Group project due	Check Classroom for required reading and videos
Virtual Week 5 Feb 17-21	<i>Community-Based Conservation</i>	Reflection assignment	Check Classroom for required reading and videos
Weeks 1-5	<i>Pre-Departure Preparation</i>	Pre-departure modules Housing agreement	Live pre-departure meeting: TBD

Week	Subject	Assignments	Activity/ Site Visit
Jan 20- Feb 21		Code of conduct	
Costa Rica Day 2 Feb 23	<i>Cultural Immersion and Hands-on Learning</i>	Participation & Engagement <i>Recommended - work on cultural exchange project, sustainability action plan, and reflection presentation</i>	Class meeting San José walking tour Indigenous craft activity
Costa Rica Day 3 Feb 24	<i>Sustainability from the Field to the Kitchen</i>	Participation & Engagement <i>Recommended - work on cultural exchange project, sustainability action plan, and reflection presentation</i>	Class meeting Organic coffee tour Zero-waste cooking class
Costa Rica Day 4 Feb 25	<i>Protecting Natural Resources</i>	Participation & Engagement <i>Recommended - work on cultural exchange project, sustainability action plan, and reflection presentation</i>	Volcano tour Sustainable business tour Class meeting
Costa Rica Day 5 Feb 26	<i>Immersive Community Experience</i>	Participation & Engagement <i>Recommended - work on cultural exchange project, sustainability action plan, and reflection presentation</i>	Cooperative introduction Farm tour Night tour
Costa Rica Day 6 Feb 27	<i>Immersive Community Experience continued</i>	Participation & Engagement <i>Recommended - work on cultural exchange project, sustainability action plan, and reflection presentation</i>	Farm tour
Costa Rica Day 7 Feb 28	<i>Wrap-up and final reflections</i>	Reflection presentation due	Class meeting
March 15		Sustainability action plan due Cultural exchange project due	

