

Welcome to Costa Rica, San Isidro de el General Spring 2020

Welcome as a student with Kulturstudier and UISIL - San Isidro de el General, Costa Rica.

When you arrive in San Isidro del General (also normally called just Pérez Zeledón or Pérez. Be aware that there are more than one San Isidro) you will have close contact with the local staff that will answer many of your questions - but a good journey starts before take-off. In this document we have gathered the most important practical information that you will need. It's important that you read this very carefully before arriving.

We will have our first info meeting at Hotel Zima ([MAP](#)) Sunday 5th of January at 13:00. The staff will be there from 11:00 and you are most welcome to join them from 11:00 for a swim in the pool and some lunch.

Help yourself.

Kulturstudier is an educational institution with an emphasis on teaching our academic programs. We consider our students to be responsible adults and do not wish to create a summer camp environment where your whole stay is organised by us. For the most part, you will set up a good life in San Isidro on your own. In this manner, it will be easier for you to explore and get to know your new home. This means, for example, that if you are unlucky enough that your luggage doesn't arrive, you'll have to make contact with the airline company yourself. If you have trouble with your ticket, you have to talk to the airline company/travel agency. If you need to see a doctor, we provide phone numbers and addresses so you can contact the doctor and go by yourself, or together with your new roommate. If you want to travel during the weekends, you will have to find the information about the buses. If the shower in your room doesn't work, you need to talk to the house manager. In other words, you just act in the same way as if you were travelling on your own.

When all of this is said, our staff in San Isidro will work as your safety net. You are going to see us every day and we are going to be available to give you advice, counselling and guidance. If there is a serious situation or emergency, we will always be there to help you.

In this arrival guide you will find a lot of information that you need to get started with your life in San Isidro and in your neighbourhood. Furthermore, you will receive necessary information throughout the program.

The student houses.

We have to be respectful towards the people we live with and remember that they may have other preferences when it comes to organization of things and sleep routines. All students must pay a deposit of usd 50,- and everyone is jointly and severally liable for damages.

Students live in different houses in San Isidro. In the houses provided by Kulturstudier there will be an equipped kitchen for you to share and use. As a general rule, you must clean up after using the kitchen so that it is always clean when the next person uses it. We cannot count on other people to clean up after us. Leave things as you would wish to find them. Also remember that the food leftovers will attract insects so if you want to store food it needs to be put in containers.

The houses will be cleaned weekly and towels and bed linen are changed once a week. You do not have to bring bed linen or towels, but you should bring a towel for the beach.

Your address for receiving mail in San Isidro depends on what house you live in, but you may also use:

Hotel Zima (“your name”), McDonalds 200vrs norte, 100vrs este. 11901 Perez Zeledon Centro, San José. Costa Rica.

Room assignments will be made just before the students arrive. Street names are not used as we use them in Norway. Often the direction is therefore an explanation of where your house is in relation to some monument/well known place.

Food.

Lunch is included the days we have classes at campus. The food will be Costa Rican and a variety of international cuisine. (We will do a list of vegetarians/allergies the first meeting so that there will be something for everyone).

Dinner is not included but there are a variety of places to eat out in San Isidro and you can make dinners in your houses. After a while, you will find your favorite places and share your preferred spots with others. There is options to choose from, including vegetarian and vegan options.

The Staff.

The field manager, Charlotte Fredriksen, is Kulturstudier’s head representative in San Isidro. You can reach her by e-mail: charlotte@kulturstudier.org and by telephone: +506 8595 8563 (from January 3rd) and with number +47 452 58 822 (at all times, WhatsApp only) (speaks Norwegian, English or Spanish). **OBS!** Be aware that the e-mail ends with .org!

Other staff members are:

- Maria Soledad, academic coordinator Spanish
E-mail: msloriodelc@yahoo.es
- Ruth Martinez, academic coordinator History
E-mail: ruth@kulturstudier.org

General information about the studies

The basis for all studies at university level is the individual student's effort to learn. Kulturstudier and UISIL's academic staff is highly motivated to help you along the way with lectures and seminars, but a successful study is first and foremost dependent on your own preparation for lectures and seminars. You are expected to attend both lectures and seminars, and to be well prepared for both.

Therefore:

- Read as much of the curriculum as possible before you leave for Costa Rica.
- Develop good routines for studying efficiently after you arrive to Costa Rica. Based on experience, we know that many students feel like they have an ocean of time and thus tend to "take time off" the first few weeks for sightseeing and social activities. This is not a good idea. Firstly because studies offered by Kulturstudier are intensive, and secondly because the non-curricular activities tend to increase rather than decrease as the semester passes along. Also, the sooner you begin to involve yourself with the studies, the sooner you will "land" and adapt to the life in San Isidro. In this way you will be able to avoid reading 24-7 during the last weeks of your stay (when social activities are really starting to absorb you).
- Study efficiently! Most students discover that the study outcome increases when one takes notes or highlights important sections in the literature with a marker. If you make good notes during both lectures and self-study, you will also find it easier to review the curriculum when the exam is approaching.
- Work in groups! Our experience shows that group work offers many advantages as compared to working individually (even though you may not think so). One of the advantages of studying with Kulturstudier is that it is easy to create small study groups. This gives you, as a student, many advantages. You should thus strive to utilize this advantage.
- Participate actively in seminars and lectures! An important prerequisite for good seminars is the students' own effort. This means that we expect our students to meet for seminars and lectures well prepared and to participate actively in-group discussions. The seminars are a forum for students to discuss in depth the topics and themes already presented in the lectures. The seminars are only useful if everyone is well prepared and takes part in the discussions. Don't be afraid to say things that might be considered foolish. Take our word for it: the other

students may not know as much as it seems either. **Keep in mind that attendance and participation in lectures and seminars will affect your grade at the end of the course.**

Time plan

During the classes all students are expected to participate actively. You are thereby obliged to come prepared to class and not try to get a “free ride”. One of the nice things while studying with us is the direct contact you will have with the teachers and the other students. You will normally have classes from Monday to Friday, and some days will be more intense than others. **In other words, this is a full-time study.** The time plan will vary a bit every week, but we try our best to keep it as stable as possible. However, during the semester, changes are bound to occur; lecturers may be sick and unforeseen things may occur. The Kulturstudier staff does not have the capacity to notify all students in person about changes so changes in the schedule and important information will be sent by email, so check your email inbox every day as well.

The first day of classes is on Monday 6th of January. This day we will have a welcome ceremony at UISIL Campus for all students. And you will have your diagnostic test to see your level of Spanish (you do not have to study for this test, it is a tool for us to put you in the right groups within your courses.)

Transport

A taxi in San Isidro costs around [2500 CRC](#) from the city centre to campus (10 min drive). The local bus to campus costs [310 CRC](#) and goes from early in the morning until late afternoon.

If you are arriving on the joint arrival, we will pick you up at the airport. We can also help you arrange Airport pick- up if you arrive independently. The taxi costs around [\\$ 160](#) from the airport to San Isidro (About 145km and around a three hours drive). Please write to our Field Manager Charlotte Fredriksen for assistance with transport. We keep track of people arriving at the same time so you can share transport and make the price per person cheaper if you arrive at the same time. Note that if your flight arrives after midnight or is very delayed the price may increase. There might be other transport services offering lower prices, but we cannot guarantee the safety and quality of these drivers and therefore prefer to send you drivers that we have worked with before and trust. If you decide to stay the night in San José to take the public bus (MUSOC) to San Isidro the following day the cost is [3526 CRC](#). Take a taxi to the MUSOC bus-station. This bus starts early in the morning until around 18.00 and goes once every hour. (this information may change so the safest will be to not assume that it goes in the evening and travel during the day!) The bus ride varies from 3-4 hrs and has a short break mid-way.

Information and meetings

During the second or third week student-meeting we will ask the students to elect their student representatives. The representatives typically meet with members of staff once every two weeks. It is their job to be an intermediary between students and staff, to help make sure that staff is able to give attention to problems or opportunities that have been overlooked.

Every **Tuesday** after lunch, we will have an information meeting at the UISIL campus. These meetings are compulsory. If you for some reason cannot attend, you are responsible for reading the meeting summary or asking your fellow students for the information. The idea is to give you important information for the coming week, to discuss problems that might occur and to come with suggestions. To be able to help you with your problems we need to know what they are. More information will be sent out if there is a need for it or will sometimes be given after classes, during breaks or put up in the houses. We also use the Facebook group to give information. Please join the Facebook group already now to keep updated and in contact with your fellow students. **The group is called:** [Kulturstudier Costa Rica Spring 2020 - For students, faculty and staff](#)

Traveling and spare time

When you study our programs you are part of UISIL (University Internacional San Isidro Labrador), and can use the university's facilities including the study places and library and you can also join the different students groups they have. We recommend that you connect with other students at the University, both for friendship and to practice your Spanish.

Contact with the locals might be more difficult than you think. Even though you are students at UISIL, it takes commitment and work to get in touch with the local students.

When you are not studying, you are free to do whatever you want. San Isidro has many possibilities and it is up to you to explore them. Kulturstudier will arrange some optional activities and we can provide contacts for volunteer work. You will get more information about these things during the semester. Except from this, you should explore Costa Rica on your own or with other students during the weekends. We recommend you to not travel alone or when it's dark. We ask you to please always write the local staff when you leave town (and stay overnight), this is just in case of any emergencies.

Kulturstudier will arrange a welcome dinner on the first **Friday** of the semester and a farewell party at the end of the semester.

VISA

As a Scandinavian citizen you will automatically get a 90-days tourist VISA when you arrive in Costa Rica. It is important that when you arrive you can show a ticket out of Costa Rica within 90 days. To get a new VISA you will have to cross the boarder out of Costa Rica. This can be done by plane or by bus. The closest boarder is towards Panamá and e.g. TicaBus can be a comfortable

way of traveling by ground. Entering Panama you need to show a return ticket. Upon return to Costa Rica you will get 90 new days and you will again need to show a ticket out within new 90 days.

Money

In the center of San Isidro, you can find several ATMs where you can take out both Córdoba and dollars. **1 NOK = 62 CRC (Costa Rican Colon). 1 USD = 565 CRC.** You can use both US Dollars and Costa Rican Colon in Costa Rica.

Internet and phones

We have wireless Internet at all student houses and it is also available at the UISIL campus. But the connection may vary (and sometimes be absent) depending on how many are connected. It is not allowed to download big files, like movies, as this slows down the Internet for everyone else. We strongly recommend you to bring a laptop if you have one. It might be wise to buy a quality adapter in Norway before you leave. The electricity can be unstable in Costa Rica (especially in rainy season), and you should not leave your computer charging longer than necessary.

You can buy a local sim-card for your smart phone or a cheap cell-phone with a local sim-card. You need to buy prepaid minutes and internet at kiosks or stores or by app (Kölbi), you will find these around town. We recommend all students to buy sim card from the same phone company as it is cheaper to call each-other. In our experience “Kölbi” is the company with best signal. If you plan on traveling outside of Costa Rica you may with “Moviestar” have reception outside of the country.

Whats´app is the most used app for communication in Costa Rica, more than traditional messages and phone-calls.

Many parents want to call Kulturstudier in Oslo within a couple of days of your arrival to Costa Rica - It’s important that you call them and tell them that your journey went well and that you are in good shape. **Call or write home as soon as you arrive!**

Communication with Kulturstudier

We appreciate suggestions from students during the semester. It is important for us to make sure that suggestions and grievances are communicated to us while there is still time to make changes. This includes issues with the academic program, housing and other aspects of the program and the welfare of the students. After many years of experience there is usually a reason for the way we do things. And if you ask us we can probably give you the reason. But there is always room for improvement and reminders. So please voice your suggestions.

Compulsory Tuesday meetings

Every Tuesday, all students and staff gather for a weekly meeting. The purpose is to share information and to discuss problems and opportunities. These meetings are compulsory. If you for some reason cannot attend, you are responsible for obtaining the information from fellow students.

Talk to us

If you need help with something, it is important that you let us know. Do not take for granted that your suffering is obvious and visible to everyone. Use your voice and contact us.

Student representatives

During the second or third weeks Tuesday-meeting, we will ask the students to elect their representatives. The representatives typically meet with members of staff once every two weeks. It is their job to be an intermediary between students and staff, to help make sure that staff know what the problems are and together with students can work together to solve them. For specific occasions, trips, happenings, etc, separate committees can be formed. These will be responsible for planning and carrying out the activities.

Final evaluation form

At the end of the semester, you will receive an extensive evaluation form from Kulturstudier where you are expected to give us your feedback and help us improve.

Complaints

If you have tried the above, and feel that you are not getting serious response, you are welcome to file a complaint by contacting Kulturstudier in Oslo. Preferably in time to make us able to act on your issues. Please write in English: [Feedback and Complaints](#)

If you decide your complaint is not treated seriously by Kulturstudier, and you want to further your complaint beyond Kulturstudier, you can contact the University.

Ethical conduct

In Kulturstudier there is no tolerance for harassment or bullying. We also expect everyone to avoid using swearing and offensive language in their communication with each other. Harassment also includes sexual harassment from staff towards students. If you experience sexual harassment from Kulturstudier/UISIL staff or lecturers you should report to alarm@kulturstudier.org, which will be treated confidentially. Staff and teachers are informed that sexual attention towards students is strictly prohibited. We expect staff and students to socialize together, but drunkenness or drugs is not accepted. Neither is drunk driving.

Local knowledge

Efficiency is different here in Costa Rica than back home, so being patient is very important! Communication problems often create misunderstandings and rumors. Even those of us that have

been living in Latin-America for a long time must accept that things do not go as smooth as we wish. To get frustrated, angry and stressed and to show immediate irritation will make the situation more difficult and might damage your relationship with other people.

In Costa Rica there are other norms and values when it comes to clothing. To maintain a respectful relationship with the local population, it is important that we analyze and think about what might be considered as inappropriate. As a general rule, the more decent you are dressed and the better behaved you are, the more respect and less negative attention you will receive. In other words: The respect you get is connected to the respect you show. When we have classes at UISIL Campus the general rule is to wear long pants/skirts and t-shirt/top. We advise you to observe how the Costa Rican students dress, and then try to adapt to this.

A Scandinavian student will attract more attention in San Isidro than in Stavanger or Bergen. This means that people you don't know might want to know about who you are and if you are a part of the Norwegian group. To get the acceptance of a group of students and to integrate them in the local society, it is important to think about what kind of signals we give. Each student serves as a representative for the group and can influence how Costa Ricans view the entire group.

It is also important to understand that gender roles are different here than at home. This can be a source of misunderstandings, especially for Scandinavian girls. Girls can get a lot of attention from men. Whether they like it or not this is a part of Latin-American culture, and you should find a strategy to deal with these encounters that will be understood by the local population. Men will also find examples of gender differences.

General routines

You will travel to Costa Rica as students, not as charter tourists. It is up to you to choose what you want to do during your spare time, and it is up to you to choose what you want to make of your stay. We do recommend that you begin your daily routines as fast as possible in order to get used to life in San Isidro. Even though you will be studying in another continent, there are many routines and activities you can continue with. The most important thing is to get started with your studies, reading, and to remember the study habits you had at home. We also recommend you to bring running shoes and a gym bag in order to take advantage of some of the training opportunities you can find. San Isidro is a mid-sized city and has different recreational opportunities. Students can fill their free time with traveling, in the cinema, voluntary work, course activities and sports. There are several mountains around San Isidro that you can hike and the university has several students groups that for example does dance or football.

Climate

Costa Rica has a range of microclimates. On the Pacific side (where San Isidro is located), *invierno* (winter), or rainy season, runs from May to November, *Verano* (summer), or dry season, is December to April. For the Autumn semester you should bring a light rain jacket.

Mold (mugg) is a common problem in the tropics, especially in rainy season. Clothes, books, shoes etc. can easily get damaged if they are kept many days in closed compartments, such as in your suitcase, a drawer, or in a closed cabinet, without much ventilation. The way to prevent mold is by ventilation. Keep windows, drawers, closets and doors open as much as possible. Keeping the fan on helps.

Safety

It is important to remember that Costa Rica is a country that also has many poor people. However, San Isidro is said to be a safe city in Costa Rica. But still, we need to give you some advice on safety here, and we will give you more advice once you are in San Isidro.

- It is not safe, especially not for girls, to walk alone during the night.
- We always recommend taking a taxi after dark.
- Never visit a place alone at night if you are drunk!
- Don't accept drinks from strangers.
- Always keep an eye on your belongings and don't walk around with a lot of cash or valuables.
- Even in your home, it is best to keep your things in good order and not leave your valuables, cameras etc. out. We trust our employees, but we don't want to cause temptation that they can't resist. If something disappears it will usually lead to an awkward situation with accusations, arguments etc.

Drinking and driving is against the law, as anywhere else. Never take a ride with someone who has been drinking. If you are caught drunk driving, or taking a ride with someone who has been drinking, this is considered as highly irresponsible behavior and might be a reason for expulsion from the program.

You should not carry around your passport in San Isidro, but it is wise to always keep a copy of it in your wallet (Take a picture and store it on your phone). It can be smart to scan important documents such as your passport, insurance papers and flight tickets, and mail this to yourself so that you always have it available if you need it. When you travel outside of San Isidro you need to bring your passport, as most hotels ask for it during check in, and just in case you get stopped by the police.

Drugs

Kulturstudier takes drug consumption very seriously. Not only to fight it, but also to maintain our good reputation. Even though Costa Rica has strict laws concerning the use of drugs, the consumption is common in some parts of the city. Many may see and be offered drugs, and might be told that you don't have to worry about the police. This is not true. The local police have a very

good control of the drug consumption, and if you don't keep away from it, the police might use you as an example. The prisons in Costa Rica are pretty crowded and not very nice. A Scandinavian student in there would probably receive a lot of attention both by the media and the Norwegian Embassy in Mexico. This would also make it hard to find a job later on in life. In other words: Kulturstudier has **zero** tolerance for the use of drugs among our students, and our immediate and only action is to expel you from the program.

Health

Preparations before leaving: *prevention is the best cure!*

We encourage all students travelling to Costa Rica to consult a doctor or a vaccination clinic before travelling. The doctors and nurses there will be able to advise you on which vaccines you should take prior to your travels. Remember that some of the vaccines must be taken 2-3 times in order to have an effect. You should therefore not consult the doctor just a few days prior to your departure! If you travel prior, during or after your stay in Costa Rica to other places, this is important information to give to the vaccination clinic.

Yellow fever vaccine. Costa Rica (and other countries in the region) will ask for proof of yellow fever vaccine if you come from/pass through countries with risks of Yellow Fever. Eg. Panamá, among other Latin American countries are on this list: [List of countries](#) So have this in mind if you plan to go traveling in the region. Keep yourselves updated on the newest information.

Generally, it is safe to eat out in San Isidro, but be careful with salad, uncooked vegetables and meat when eating in certain places, especially in the street. The water in San Isidro is considered drinkable, but we recommend that you buy bottled water, at least the first weeks.

Some of you will get sick in the beginning of your stay. Usually we are talking about annoying, but not very dangerous stomach infections. They can be partly avoided by wise choices about where and what you eat and drink, and hygiene. It is important to drink a lot of water. We recommend at least 3 liters a day of total fluid intake, because it is easy to get dehydrated. When you have a stomach infection, it is smart to drink water mixed with oral rehydration salts (ORS). You can buy it in the pharmacy under the name "Suero oral". The milk from a green coconut and the sports drink Gatorade/Poweraid may also help. The ORS allows the body to absorb more liquid and minerals even though you may have diarrhea. Therefore, this will help you to get on your feet faster. Hand hygiene is the most important precaution. Wash your hands often and thereby avoid most of the germs.

Every year there are cases of Dengue Fever and Chikungunya in Central America, which is a tropical disease, caused by the virus transmitted through mosquito bites. The symptoms are high fever, fatigue, headache, pain in the eyes, rash and muscle pain. The virus often spreads more during the rainy season (the autumn) and it normally affects the local population. No vaccine exists

to prevent this virus, but you can protect yourself by putting on mosquito repellent and use a mosquito net. The mosquitos are most active during sunrise and sunset, so this is the most important time to put on mosquito repellent and/or wear long-sleeved clothes. If you are worried about having Dengue Fever you should see a doctor right away.

Malaria is not considered a problem in this region, and it is therefore not common for the local population or visitors to use malaria prevention pills. Some students that have planned to visit malaria-contaminated areas may have take these pills. It's up to each one of you to choose if you want to take these pills, but be aware of the side effects. Consult a doctor before you leave from home and do research for the specific areas you may want to travel.

Roommates have a certain responsibility to show some extra care when one of you are sick. This means for example to help your roommate to get to the doctor, help with food and to help buying medicine. If you can't do it yourself, we would like your roommate to inform the staff so that we can follow up. **It is important that the staff knows about your condition so they can help you and update your family if they get phone calls from home.** Normal practice for the clinics and doctors in San Isidro is that the patient pays for their consults/stay upon leaving and after makes a claim with the insurance company that will pay them back. The insurance company (Gouda) will, in any serious cases, need to be informed about your condition so they can have their own doctors counseling on the treatment-plans.

We will provide a list of doctors and clinics you should use. The majority of doctors on this list also speaks English. We usually only get students with minor health problems, but when you are far away from home, it can feel more dramatic than at home. Remember to take care of each other, and to contact the staff if you don't feel safe.

Culture Shock

To stay in a foreign country for a long time is usually a wonderful experience, but you should expect some difficulties during your stay. Most people go through phases characterized by alternating mental ups and downs. This phenomenon is common enough to have its own term, "culture shock". It may be a good idea to share these experiences with your co-students so you can help each other to see your reactions in a bigger perspective. Culture shock is often divided into 3 phases:

Tourist phase - you have just arrived in the country and everything is new and exciting.
Sentencing phase - the reaction phase, you've come across the first "top". What is new and different is not that exciting anymore, so you are more vulnerable to the frustration of the things you are not accustomed to - the language is different, differences in behavior and way of thinking, customs. You may experience to feel tired and sad and less sociable and to have strong homesickness. This may lead to you being less patient and more irritable.

Reorientation phase - you start to get used to and accept cultural differences. Instead of criticizing, it is easier to appreciate the differences and understand how to navigate in the new society.

Reverse culture shock

It sounds strange, but after having lived overseas for several months, one can often experience a reverse culture shock when returning home. You have finally begun to get used to life in the host country. When back home, everyday life feels different. Things have changed, or you have been given a new look at things. You may feel that you have difficulties to fit into society again. It is often difficult to share the experiences with family and friends, as they do not really understand what you have experienced. It can be useful to get together with others who have been travelling too, and share experiences and personal challenges from time abroad.

The end

How your semester will look in San Isidro will be very different for each semester. As Kulturstudier students, you will form a part of how the students will be perceived by the local population. It is also up to the group and each individual student to choose how you will spend your months in Costa Rica. It is easy to just stay together as Scandinavians or tourists. With Kulturstudier you will get a soft landing and a steady study pace, but if you want to experience Costa Rica, you have to explore it by yourself and look for friendships and experiences on your own.

We look forward to getting to know you, and wish you good luck with your stay!