

## Welcome to Costa Rica, San Isidro de El General Spring 2024

Welcome as a student with Kulturstudier and UISIL - San Isidro de El General, Costa Rica, also often called just Pérez Zeledón or Pérez. Please be aware that there is more than one San Isidro in Costa Rica. When you arrive in [San Isidro de El General](#) you will have close contact with the local staff that will answer many of your questions - but a good journey starts before arriving! In this document we have gathered the most important practical information that you will need. We ask you to read everything very carefully before arriving.

### 1- Kulturstudier staff in Costa Rica

**Administrative and academic staff in San Isidro (any enquiry before 8th of January, please contact us via email [costarica@kulturstudier.no](mailto:costarica@kulturstudier.no) )**

The administrative staff coordinates every situation or issue related to health, safety, housing, food and social well-being. They will also organize the arrival to San Isidro and arrange some social activities during the semester. You will meet our staff at our **Welcome Meeting on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> of January at 11:00 am** at Hotel [ZIMA](#).

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## **2- Help yourself and assistance**

Kulturstudier is an educational institution with an emphasis on 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 organized by us. For the most part, you will set up your 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 does not arrive, you will have to contact 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 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 does not work, you need to talk to the house manager. In other words, you just act in the same way as if you were traveling on your own.

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 the necessary information throughout the program.

## **3- Housing**

### **The housing list**

In the beginning of January we will publish a document with an overview of the student groups rotation plan. At some point during the program most students will live 4-5 weeks in ASOFEQUE families, 4 nights in a host family in the rural community of Longo Mai and about 11 weeks in student houses. The week before the program starts, students will receive an email with the detailed housing list document, which informs about the respective homestay period and where each student will be allocated.

### **The homestays**

ASOFEQUE (Asociación Femenina Quebradas) is a local women's organization responsible for the homestays. They focus on a circular and solidarity economy providing different services such as homestays to foreign volunteers or students, catering services and the organization of social events. They also administer the lodging facilities of [FUDEBIOL reforestation project](#). This important nature-conservation project is responsible for taking care of the forest where the drinking water of San Isidro city springs. Your homestay with ASOFEQUE families includes one

night at FUDEBIOL lodging facility in the middle of the forest. In the end of this document you will find some more information about the homestay program.

### **The student houses**

Students live in different houses or apartments in San Isidro. In the houses provided by Kulturstudier, there will be an equipped kitchen for you to share and use. 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 and animals, so if you want to store food it needs to be put in containers.

We have to be respectful towards the people we live with and remember that they may have other preferences when it comes to the organization of daily life and sleeping routines.

We recommend you to have house meetings on a regular basis to agree on how you want to organize your daily life and household tasks together. Creating a space to talk about everybody's expectations, as well as issues that might occur when many people live together in a shared house/ room, might help to avoid conflicts within the student houses.

The houses will be cleaned weekly and towels and bed linen will be changed once a week. You do not have to bring bed linen or towels, but you must have your own towel to take to the beach or pool.

You will see that most designs of the average house are boxy, with the houses directly next to one another and then gated all around by cement walls and iron bars, due to safety measures. It is important to take good care of always closing the doors of your houses. As well it is important to keep your keys accessible when doors are locked, to be able to leave the house in any case of emergency.

**Toilet paper:** Flushing toilet paper in Costa Rica is a no-no. The simple reason for the request is that Costa Rica's small and antiquated septic systems cannot accommodate discarded toilet paper without clogging, just for you to be aware of and avoid any chaos.

**Hot water:** Don't take hot water for granted. It sounds pretty basic, considering the majority of North America/Europe has hot water in every faucet or at least every home. But that is not always the case in Costa Rica. There is a large percentage of homes that do not have hot water. The student houses do have hot water, but as in many homes with hot water, it is limited to only the shower or certain faucets. You will find wall-mounted instant hot water units (that use less electricity than the tank units). These units are capable of heating the water very quickly and to a

very high temperature. You can adjust the max temperature of the water for comfort and safety. Ask your family members to show you how to use the shower correctly.

**Washing machines:** In your houses, you have washing machines to wash your clothes. It is important for you to know that these usually work with cold water. Therefore, detergents are often stronger so everything gets clean. As well washing machines are not comparable with the ones we know from Europe. Be prepared to wash delicate clothes by hand or think about not taking your favourite delicate pieces to Costa Rica. Especially during the rainy season (autumn), you have to calculate the hours of sun to dry your clothes efficiently.

**ADDRESS:** 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 200m norte, 100m 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 Europe. Often the direction is therefore an explanation of where your house is in relation to some monument/well known place. You will receive your "address" to give to the migration officer before your arrival, or you may use the above address to Hotel Zima.

#### **4- Food**

Lunch is included at the university Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The food will be Costa Rican typical cuisine. Food will be made adjusted to vegetarians, allergies etc.

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

During your Homestay breakfast is included. You can decide if you want to have other meals with the family. The cost of extra meal lunch/dinner is CRC 3.000 (about \$5,50).

#### **5- 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:

- 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 classes and lectures! An important prerequisite for good classes 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 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 classes will affect your grade at the end of the course.**

## 6- Time plan (schedule)

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 at campus is the direct contact you will have with the teachers. You will have classes from Monday to Thursday, during daytime. Occasionally you may have academic activities a couple of Fridays during the whole program. Some days will be more intense than others. **Remember, this is a full-time study.** The time plan may vary, 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 28th of August. This day we will have a welcome ceremony at UISIL Campus for all students.

## 7- Transport

We can help you arrange Airport pick- up if you arrive independently. The taxi costs around \$200 from the airport to San Isidro (about 145 km/ approximately three hours drive). Please fill in the *arrival-form* and write to [costarica@kulturstudier.no](mailto:costarica@kulturstudier.no) for assistance with transport outside of joint-arrival. 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.

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 around 4500CRC. 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 way is to travel during the day. The bus ride varies from 3-4 hours and has a short break mid-way. Information about MUSOC-bus: <https://www.musoccr.com>

Remember that Costa Rica is part of the Global South, so transportation is not quite as efficient as in Europe. In Costa Rica public transportation is actually very good if you are going to popular tourist destinations and major areas. Sometimes a lot of patience and time is required. As well you can take private transportation (which will take you faster but is a bit more expensive). Regarding public transportation there might be some bus stops that don't even have a sign; it is helpful to ask locals where the bus stops are. There is no efficient app or website for all the buses in the country, though some offer a trustworthy schedule online. If you use Uber or any private app to get from one place to the other, we recommend you to send your live location to your host family or a close friend, to have a glimpse on where you are. A taxi in San Isidro costs around 2500 CRC from the city center to campus (10 min drive). The local bus to campus costs around 400 CRC and goes from early in the morning until late afternoon.

## 8- Information and meetings

Wellcome Meeting will take place on **Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> of January at 11:00 am at Hotel Zima**. Here we will share important information about Costa Rica, the area you live in, housing,

health, safety and daily life during your stay.

There will be a welcome ceremony and an academic information meeting for all students at UISIL university on **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> of January**.

Every Tuesday after lunch we will have a short information meeting at the UISIL campus. These meetings are compulsory. If you are not able to attend for some reason, you are responsible to ask your fellow students for the information. The idea is to provide you with important information for the coming weeks, 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. If there is a need for it, more information will be sent out, given after classes, during breaks or put up in the houses. We also use the Facebook group to update you with important information.

During the first weeks we will also 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.

## **9- Traveling and spare time**

When you study our programs, you are part of UISIL (Universidad Internacional San Isidro Labrador) and can use the university's facilities for studying.

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 topics during the semester. Besides, 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 is dark. We ask you kindly to write to the local staff without exception if you leave town and stay overnight, to be prepared in any case of emergency.

## **10- VISA**

As a Scandinavian citizen you will automatically get a 180-days tourist VISA when you arrive in Costa Rica. It is important that you are able to show an outbound ticket (bus or airplane) to leave Costa Rica within 180 days.

## 11- Money

In the center of San Isidro, you can find several ATMs where you can take out both Colones and dollars. **1 NOK = 50 CRC (Costa Rican Colon). 1 USD = 550 CRC.** You can use both US Dollars and Costa Rican colones in touristic places in Costa Rica, although Colones is the most commonly used currency and of course accepted in any situation. If you travel to rural areas, as well as some little beach towns that are less touristy, it is important to be aware that there might not be any ATM. In the big supermarkets it is usually possible to pay with a card, while small stores - especially in villages - often only accept cash.

## 12- Internet and phones

We have wireless Internet at all student houses and homestays, and it is also available at the UISIL campus. Be aware that the quality of 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. We advise you to buy a high quality adapter before you leave Norway or Europe. The electricity can be quite unstable in Costa Rica (especially in the rainy season in the autumn), and you should not leave your computer charging longer than necessary.

In Costa Rica many populated areas have access to the internet, though in small towns (such as Longi Mai) it isn't quite as common to have access to a high speed internet, and in some far or isolated areas it just doesn't exist. It is not a guarantee that in your homestay you will have a high running internet. Anyways, you can always get a SIM card with the speed you desire.

You can buy a local sim-card for your smartphone or a cheap cell-phone with a local sim-card, remember to ask them to activate the sim-card at the store. 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-cards from the same phone company as it is cheaper to call each other. In our experience *Kölbi* is the company with the best signal.

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 is important for you to call your family and tell them that your journey went well and that you are in good shape. **Call or write home as soon as you arrive!**

### 13- 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*

As mentioned before, every Tuesday, students and staff gather for a weekly meeting just after lunch. The purpose is to share information and to discuss problems and opportunities. These meetings are compulsory. If you are not able to attend for some reason, 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. Please contact us via Email, whatsapp or in person at the UISIL office.

#### *Student representatives*

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. That way they can help to make sure that our staff knows what the problems are and work on solving those together with the students. For specific occasions, trips, happenings, houses 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 to improve.

#### *Complaints*

If you have tried the above, and feel that you are not getting a 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.

## **14- Local knowledge**

Efficiency is different here in Costa Rica than back home, so being patient is very important! Communication problems often create misunderstandings and rumours. Even those of us that have been living in Latin-America for a long time must accept that things do not go as smoothly 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 analyse 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 custom is to wear long pants/skirts and t-shirt/top, though this is not a requirement. We advise you to observe how the Costa Ricans 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 do not 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 be aware of gender roles being different in Costa Rica than at home. This can be a source of misunderstandings, especially for Scandinavian girls. Girls can get a lot of attention from men. Though for many people it is viewed as a part of Latin-American culture, this might cause you to feel uncomfortable and you should be prepared and find a strategy to deal with these encounters that will be understood by the local population. Men will also find examples of gender differences.

## **15- 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 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. In autumn is rainy season in Costa Rica, it is important to have rain clothes, rain shoes / boots available, especially during the day excursions and the overnight field trip. During the dry season you need to have rubber boots and rain jacket for the overnight field trip as well, since in the southern part of Costa Rica and especially Longo Mai there might be rainy weather as well.

## **16- 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. Especially for the Autumn semester you should bring a light rain jacket and proper shoes.

Mold (mugg) is a common problem in the tropics, especially in the 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. As well you might check on your stored belongings once in a while to take them out into the sun.

## **Flora y fauna**

Costa Rica has a wealth of natural diversity and wildlife, making it one of the most biodiverse places on earth. Costa Rica is home to around 5% of the world's biodiversity. What this means is that the number of wildlife species per 10,000 sq km here is 615. This fact alone shows the spectacular natural splendor that Costa Rica has to offer. That means as well that you should get prepared for mosquito parties and different types of flowers, trees, insects and animals during these next months. Costa Rica is well known for its flora and fauna diversity. From National parks to your own home, you might find new species you have never seen before. It is always a good idea to keep mosquito repellent at hand. As well, be prepared to encounter cockroaches or ants inside of buildings once in a while. Some people find it useful to bring a travel mosquito net for their journeys.

## 17- 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 [mail@kulturstudier.no](mailto:mail@kulturstudier.no), 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 are not accepted. Neither is drunk driving.

## 18- Safety and sexual harassment

As in any other place in the world, you should take safety precautions. Poverty and inequality remain as the main concerns on this side of the world. That means you have to take care of yourself and your belongings when you go out. This does not mean that you cannot go to the supermarket or beach by yourself, but you always have to stay attentive. Especially being a tourist, people know that you have more money than they do. So be conscious about how much money and valuable items you take with you when leaving the house. Regardless of your gender, you should not walk the street by yourself at night. At parties take good care of your drinks, since date rape drugs are used in Costa Rica as they are in European countries. Unfortunately, machismo, or male chauvinism/sexism is very present in Costa Rica. Wolf whistles, *piropos* (come-ons or pick-up lines) are common and men may be very invasive and insistent to catch your attention, especially (but certainly not exclusively) in the direction of younger foreign women living in Costa Rica.

San Isidro is said to be a safe city in Costa Rica. Anyways, we need you to take our advice into account:

- 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!
- Try to take transportation home together.
- Do not accept drinks from strangers.
- Always keep an eye on your belongings and do not 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 do not want to cause temptation that they cannot resist. If something disappears it will usually lead to an awkward situation with accusations, arguments etc.

- Do not trespass private property! We are not in the United States of America, but it is certainly dangerous to enter people's property without permission. As well, people often have dogs to protect their houses.

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 behaviour and might be a reason for expulsion from the program.

You should not carry around your passport in San Isidro, but you should always keep a copy of it in your wallet and have a picture of it on your cell phone. It can be smart to scan important documents such as your passport, visa stamp 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.

## **19- 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 do not have to worry about the police. This is not true. The local police have a very good control of drug consumption, and if you do not keep away from it, the police might use you as an example. The prisons in Costa Rica are crowded and not very nice. A Scandinavian student there would probably receive a lot of attention both by the media and the Norwegian Embassy in Mexico. 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!

## **20- Health**

COVID-19: Here you can find the latest information about Coronavirus in Costa Rica.

- a. Important information for entrance to Costa Rica:  
<https://www.visitcostarica.com/en/costa-rica/planning-your-trip/entry-requirements>

In Costa Rica as per now there are no restrictions due to the virus. It is not mandatory to wear masks inside public spaces.

### **Insurance**

If you are insured with *Norwegian Europeiske* you have access to counseling for health issues by phone +47 21 49 24 01.

## **Basic health**

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. You can protect yourself by putting on mosquito repellent and using 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 Costa Rica, 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 to take these pills. It is 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 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 is sick. This means for example to help your roommate to get to the doctor, help with food and to help buy 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 consultations/stay upon leaving and after making a claim with the insurance company that will pay them back. The insurance company (Europeiske) will, in any serious cases, need to be informed about your condition so they can have their own doctors counselling on the treatment-plans.

We will provide a list of doctors and clinics you should use. 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.

**Yellow fever vaccine.** Costa Rica (and other countries in the region) may 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](#) Have this in mind along with stricter Covid-measures if you plan to go traveling in the region. Keep yourselves updated on the newest information.

## **Mental Health**

If you have mental health issues it is good to let us know and be able to help you get in contact with professional help if needed. A new situation like a stay in a foreign country is not easy for anybody. If you need psychological support, do not hesitate to contact your staff.

## **21- 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 feeling 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 fitting 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 traveling too and share experiences and personal challenges from time abroad.

## **22- Homestays**

When first arriving in Costa Rica things can be confusing and difficult, however, your host family is able to assist with local guidance about transport, shopping, banking as well as introducing and assisting with networks, mentoring, local culture, emotional support, etc.

### **Culture**

Staying with a local family will really submerge you into the culture and Costa Rican life. Homestay programs provide students with a more authentic intercultural experience, providing opportunities to help develop knowledge, skills and understanding around the society. In most cases you will spend evenings and free time with your host family, having meals and social time with them, and experiencing daily life in your host country. Living with host families will provide you with more opportunities to experience local cuisine, as well as local events and places that most tourists and other visitors to the country will be unaware of. Additionally, host families can give you tips and guidance on how to get by in your new environment. Staying with a family will prompt the opportunity to create lifelong cross-cultural friendships, gain a richer understanding of Costa Rican culture. As well, opening the doors to develop a new perspective of your own cultural background and broaden your horizon regarding intercultural competence.

### **Language**

One of the best ways to learn a new language is to be fully immersed in the language, and there is no better way of immersing yourself than with a homestay! In a host family, you will be required to converse in the native language of your host country, allowing you to improve your Spanish skills on a daily basis and be able to see the world with a new perspective. Your host family will most likely be thrilled to help you practice your language abilities. Engaging in daily small talks in your new language can be more helpful in building conversations than any class, and having strong language skills will make living in a foreign country far easier. As well you will find it easier to explore the country and meet new people.

### **Friends**

Although most college students and young adults in homestay programs have been away from home before, finding yourself in an entirely new country, far from your friends and family can be

a lonely and daunting experience. Homestay programs are a great way to make new friends, as in most cases, homestay families have children themselves. Host families also provide a good support system for international students who are far from home, and friendships are often formed between hosts and students.

## **Safety**

In a homestay program, your host family is there to look after you, much like your family at home. They will be concerned about your safety and might as well provide emotional support at home.

## **2- Typical Challenges**

### **Communication**

Since you are going to live with other students in the same host family, keep in mind that speaking your native language (when being with your host family) might seem impolite. Communication might be the biggest challenge among all, since it can be interpreted in so many ways that you can either catch or express the right or wrong message. Imagine that this can happen even when speaking the same language and having the same cultural background. We want to remind you that communication is made up of not only words but also non-verbal language. Some further important topics that you might want to be aware of when emerging into a new culture: assumption of similarities (what is normal for you might not be for the others), language differences (when using certain expressions or the tone and volume of the voice), nonverbal misinterpretation. As well, be aware of preconceptions and stereotypes you might have about Latin America and question those constantly. This openness might help to understand the people around you and avoid the tendency to judge too quickly.

### **Traditional Food**

Costa Rican cuisine is nutritionally well rounded, always cooked from scratch, and loaded with the many exotic fruits and vegetables available locally. When experiencing an abroad adventure, food is one of the most interesting ways of cultural expression you can get. In Latin America homemade dishes, interesting combinations, tropical fruits and veggies are part of daily cuisine. With a homestay you might have the opportunity to experience "how to's" from scratch, that you can take (in the future) with you wherever you are; tortillas, empanadas, chorreadas, beverages, etc...Get prepared for new and different flavours; from seafood, soups till "casados", which you will see everywhere. Casado is the most typical dish and consists of rice and beans served with different side dishes. Usually in local families you eat rice and beans on a daily basis. We encourage you to be curious and become an expert taster. During your stay with ASOFEQUE breakfast with your family is included. If you choose to have lunch and/or dinner with your family, you have to pay extra. The price for extra meals is around 3.000 crc (about \$3,50).

## **Cultural aspects**

Once in your homestay you will notice some cultural aspects have a different dynamic on this side of the world. Nevertheless, people's mentality is getting more and more open to other ways of seeing the world, subcultures and diversity. In your homestay you might encounter more open-minded family members as well as people with very conservative mindsets. In many of the families you will find very traditional gender roles. The expectation on how to behave and what to do might differ depending on the gender of the person. Generally, you will see that family members do not change clothes in front of each other. Some families might find it impolite and uncomfortable if students wear nightgowns or underwear in shared spaces. Many people in Costa Rica are religious (mostly Catholic or of other Christian currents) and practice their beliefs in their daily lives.

Not being hetero is still difficult in Costa Rica, as anywhere in the world, but as well there has been a change during the last 10 years towards a more open-minded society and marriage between two people of the same sex is legal since 2020. Anyways you might be confronted with homophobic and sexist jokes or comments during your stay in Costa Rica.

## **Personal Hygiene**

Due to the hot and humid climate, people in the tropics usually have daily showers. Students are expected to take a shower every day as well.

## **Resilience**

One of the best ways to immerse yourself deeply into a culture is being open and resilient. To create a memorable experience and improve your understanding of language and culture, it is important to try to observe and adapt to your new environment. That way you will have an intense learning experience that you will hold throughout your life path. The cultural change will be a huge challenge that might not be as easy, but having an open mind and heart will get you to amazing places and create strong connections. During these coming months you will learn many things about this country, its people, culture, language and especially about yourself and your own cultural background.

**Important:** Kulturstudier is available for any problem that cannot be solved within the family; uncomfortable situations or internal conflict that may affect the wellbeing of the students. Any episode of domestic, verbal or sexual harassment or violence within the family or against the student will not be tolerated. Below you will find the list of rules in ASOFEQUE families.



Family:

1. Be part of the host family in a respectful way
2. Speak and interact with confidence among the family members

Food:

3. If you have any type of food allergy, please communicate that ahead of time. As well, if the food menu does not suit you well.
4. Pay the extra meals consumed before leaving the homestay (CRC 3.000 per meal).

Hygiene:

5. Take a daily shower
6. Maintain order in the guest house and personal room
7. Deliver dirty clothes every 2 to 3 days to be washed
8. Have your personal things, toothpaste, bath soap, hair shampoo and razors
9. Deposit toilet papers in the trash can (home drains tend to have paper plugs)

General rules:

10. No drugs, no alcohol
11. No smoking is permitted in the host family houses
12. For permanent students: Pay the month till date to be agreed by both parties
13. Do not take bath towels from the guest houses for beaches
14. Request house keys and take good care of them
15. When arriving late at night enter without making noise.
16. It is allowed to go out but arrival time at homestays is at 12am midnight.

## **23- The end**

How your semester will look in San Isidro will be very different for each semester, depending on the group and depending on the individuals. 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 weeks 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 seeing you in Costa Rica and wish you good luck with your stay!*