

***IDH-4007 and IDH-4008 Aesthetics, Values, and Authority***  
***STUDY ABROAD IN COSTA RICA- Policies/Syllabus***

***Dr. Tom Pliske, Senior Lecturer Emeritus, Dept. of Earth and Environment;***  
***Fellow of the Honors College***

***IDH-4007:***

This course will help to prepare you for the experience you will have in Costa Rica. One major focus of our travels will be on the diverse natural history of the country, which in an area smaller than the state of Florida encompasses sixteen different bioregions, split between the Atlantic and Pacific slopes, ranging from lowland rainforest to alpine *paramo* at altitudes of more than 3000m. Another major focus is the collective evolution that Costa Rica has undergone to enshrine its environmental richness as a national ethos of conservation and global sharing through sustainable ecotourism and sustainable development in the widest sense.

**Attendance:** We meet only once a week, so attendance and participation in our sharing and discussion sessions is critical. One unexcused is permitted, and any additional absences will seriously affect your grade. If jobs or other activities will necessitate asking for “excused” absences in excess of the one allowed or you being significantly late for meetings, you should rethink your participation in both courses.

Besides the various topics listed in your syllabus, our discussions will contain a regular flow of updates on FIU administrative and academic deadlines for the Studies Abroad Program and also practical information about our visit to Costa Rica. It is important that you keep abreast of these pointers and implement them as we go along. Also, these sessions are great opportunities for you to get to know one another. You are going to be living and travelling together for four weeks, so we will be taking some time to for informal sharing and snacks together.

**Readings and on-line viewing material:**

Text: Miller, Andrew P. 2014. *Ecotourism Development in Costa Rica*. Lexington Books  
ISBN: 9780739197257

Other materials will be handed out in class

**Grading:** Attendance and Participation 50%

Student Project Presentation: 50%

**Student Projects:** Everyone will be engaged in a research project which will be presented in the second part of the course. All the projects should be focused on Costa Rica, but the general importance of the subjects you choose should include the impact on Latin American regional as well as global issues. You may work alone or in pairs. It’s your choice. The projects will be a great source of information, inspiration and preparation for our trip.

I would like you to submit to me a 1-2 page project outline by September 29. The presentations will begin on October 27 and continue for the next three meetings. We should finalize the presentation schedule during the first week of October. In homage to the life-crises that sometimes affect us, you can switch dates with another person/group as long as the number of presentations for each date stays the same.

Each project will be presented to the class, and each presentation should be about an hour, including time for discussion. Each project should generate a minimum of a 2500 word essay and/or appropriate visual materials for the presentation. I would like a copy or links to the visuals in addition to the essay. You will submit essays to Turnitin.com as per all Honors College courses.

The information for Turnitin is:

Course Title: Honors 4007 Costa Rica Fall 2016  
Password: PuraVida  
Course ID#: 13093125

Based on previous years' experience, some to consider are:

1. Costa Rica's agricultural enterprises, sustainable or otherwise.
2. Costa Rica's national health care system
3. Costa Rican indigenous tribes: land tenure, politics, languages, cultural identity, art, religion/spirituality.
4. Costa Rican National Parks and bioreserves, both private and federal, in relation to ecological conservation.
5. Impact of CATIE, both nationally and regionally
6. Costa Rica energy development and policy, carbon neutrality, achievements and goals.
7. Sustainable tourism: national support, economics, governing agencies, policies, implementation, community and cooperative projects.
8. Costa Rica's economic development and transformation: from "banana republic" to 21<sup>st</sup> century ecotourism mecca, agricultural exporter and tech-industry growth.
9. Costa Rican educational system, K-12, colleges.
10. Costa Rica's immigration history, policies, population growth.
11. Cooperative and community enterprises: federal assistance and diversity.

12. Costa Rican international relations, regional, with US, global.
13. Costa Rican biodiversity (you pick a group you like: trees, orchids, birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, etc.). Or, you can pick a bioregion for your focus: Lowland Rain Forest, Cloud Forest, Mangroves, Paramo, etc.
14. The roots and practice of democracy in Costa Rica.

There is considerable overlap among these topics, so it is OK that some projects will have shared concerns. Some are very broad and could accommodate more than one project, each accenting different themes. Our host in Costa Rica is Carlos Echavarría with the *Costa Rica Rainforest Experience*. I have asked him to provide some links to organizations and agencies that will be useful for your project research. I'll pass them along as I receive them.

**Final meeting: The last on Thursday, Dec. 1 will be an info-session with the FIU Studies Abroad Program. Attendance is mandatory for this event. Y'all come!**

#### ***IDH-4008:***

The most significant part of the assignment is your participation in and experience of the activities of the expedition.

***Journal:*** Please keep a daily journal of your own experiences, either electronically or in an old-fashioned diary notebook. I will not collect or read your journals, because they are your personal property. However, I will check near the end of the trip to be sure you have kept one and that it is sufficiently detailed. The diaries will serve as the basis evening sharing sessions for the writing assignment.

***Writing assignment:*** Minimum 2000 words, due before 1 January 2017. Why am I asking for the paper more than a week before the end of the trip? It is because the grades for the winter mini-term are due on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. In past years we have not been able to get the deadline extended so we don't have to be writing long papers on top of a busy schedule in the field. Stay tuned for the resolution of this issue during the fall term (IDH-4007).

Now that we are finishing our Costa Rica experience it is time to reflect on what our expectations were when we enrolled in this course and what we have actually experienced since we have been here and continue to experience day by day.

1. At a personal level, what have you found most challenging; what has pushed you hardest to expand your horizons and perhaps your tolerance? What have you found most inspiring? What has occurred that might make you consider changes in your own values and lifestyle?
  
2. A major theme of our stay in Costa Rica is sustainability. We have been visiting national parks, wildlife preserves, tourist venues, farms and hotels all of which represent some aspects of this concept. Describe in as much detail as possible what sustainable living means to you. What lies at the root of the idea? Is it a matter of jumping through some hoops like saving so much energy, preserving forests, sharing so many *colones* with the local community, recycling a certain percentage of materials; or is there something deeper, more philosophical and spiritual than the surface forms? If so, how does one come into contact with that root? Have you made this sort of contact during the trip?
  
3. Depending on your responses to the first two questions, how do you see the fact that many Costa Ricans apparently want to head in a different economic direction than most of their neighboring nations and also different from what most Americans might choose. What characterizes this maverick tendency, this exceptionalism of Costa Rican society? What obstacles does the nation face as they try to proceed? What obstacles do we face in America if we want to go in the same direction?

You can answer these questions however you like. You can write about them separately or combine the premises into a comprehensive statement, however your creative instinct dictates. Take your time.

Please do not simply parrot back our itinerary's calendar. Do some integral soul-searching.

Try to be as sincere and candid as possible. I hope that some of you will be able to attend the Honors College promotions of next studies abroad program and share your thoughts and feelings with prospective Costa Rica adventurers for 2016-2017.

<b>Grading:</b>	Participation in the all activities of the trip, including service projects, daytime excursions, evening sharing and info sessions and the farewell dinner at the end of the trip	50%
	Cultural Ambassador/Citizenship Evaluation	25%
	Journal + Reflection Paper	25%

**Cultural Ambassador/Citizenship evaluation:** The Costa Rica program is not a vacation, and we are not tourists.

We are student visitors who want to learn about and appreciate Costa Rica and to be of service to local people working in sustainable tourism and agriculture. If someone asks you why you are here, this would be an accurate reply.

We represent the Honors College, FIU and the United States to our Costa Rican hosts. The impressions we make both within our own group and to the Costa Ricans are important. We need to be aware of local cultural norms of dress and behavior and act in such a way that people remember us with positive images and thoughts. Most of the places where we will be staying and doing service are small towns or settlements where most people know one another and follow a family-oriented Catholic tradition.

Although the legal age for purchasing/drinking alcohol in Costa Rica is 18, FIU, Honors College and Florida standards apply to our group. You must be 21. In any event, abuse of alcohol reflects badly on you and also on our group as a whole. Despite your *sagesse du moment*, my experience has taught me that you are never at your best when you have been drinking.

**Communications and chain of command:** As your trip director I am the one who carries the responsibility and authority of the Honors College and of FIU and am at your service 24-7 should you need help with anything. Our partners in *Costa Rican Rainforest Experience* and our hosts where we stay or do our service work in very close cooperation with me to make your experience as happy and fruitful as possible. However, should any problems arise I am the person that you should contact first so that issues can be resolved as smoothly as possible.

**Required Travel Documents:** A current valid passport

**Sponsors and travel in Costa Rica:** *The Costa Rica Rainforest Experience*. (Roberto) Carlos Echavarría is the chief naturalist and will be our accompanying guide for most of the trip. Carlos is bilingual Spanish-English and has a M.S. in Forestry Management from Colorado State University. He is an excellent naturalist and cultural expert for CR and can answer any question you have about the natural environment and sustainable development in the country. His special expertise is in bats and birds, but as a tour leader he is extremely knowledgeable about many, many things in Costa Rica. Take advantage of his wisdom!

We will travel by bus from location to location. The bus will carry our luggage with us.

**Local currency:** The unit of CR currency is the *Colon*, pl. *Colones*. The exchange rate varies, but is about C500 = US \$1.00. ATMs are available in every town we visit.

**Wireless Communication/Electricity:** Cell and internet service will be available in most places, but in El Copal and Chirra Island, it is intermittent and may be unavailable. Electricity is available without limit everywhere except at El Copal, where electricity is supplied by solar

panels and may be only sporadically available depending on daily sunlight. Electricity is 110V., same as in US.

## **What to bring with you: Suggestions from Carlos and from me**

**1. For informal dress** (what you would wear on campus) at CATIE Research Center and in San Jose (3-4 days total)

- better long slacks, sport shirts, blouses, skirts (2-3 outfits), presentable shoes

## **2. For field work, hiking, service projects**

- 5-8 pairs of underwear, perhaps some near death that you can throw out after use.
- Good-quality hiking or running shoes
- 2-3 pair of old running or tennis shoes which you will throw out before departing
- Flip-flops or light sandals for beach and informal indoors, sport strap-on sandals for light hiking
- Small towel
- Light wind-resistant jacket and/or sweatshirt for cool temperatures at high elevations.
- Light rain poncho, small umbrella. We will likely have a lot of rainy weather
- 3-5 T-shirts, 1 or 2 with long sleeves for sun/insect protection
- 3-4 pair of shorts: 1-2 quick-drying, 1-2 cotton Bermuda-type
- 1-2 pairs of long pants for rough work and hiking. In the forests and brushy areas, long pants are essential for protection against scrapes, insects and spiny vegetation
- 4-8 pairs of socks, some moribund that you can throw out after use
- PJs
- Swimsuit
- Broad-brimmed hat for sun protection, or baseball-type cap with bandana for neck protection.
- Personal toiletries, including sunblock and a small first-aid kit.
- High-beam-LED flashlight with backup batteries **\*\*\*VERY IMPORTANT\*\*\***  
Additional suggestion: LED headlamp for night activities.
- Lightweight collapsible backpack or tote-bag twill fit in your suitcase (for Chira Island and El Copal).
- Towels and bed linens are provided in all the places we stay.
- A pair of work gloves for service projects
- A one liter bottle for liquids when working outdoors.

### **3. *Special occasion dress:***

Please bring with you at least **one HC shirt in good condition**. If you don't have one, let me know and I will try to obtain one for you.

Laundry facilities will be available in most places at a nominal charge.

**\*\*PLEASE PACK LIGHTLY\*\***. Use a medium-sized suitcase or a duffel bag. Space on the bus is limited, and at Chira Island and El Copal, we will have to carry our stuff from the bus or boat to where we are staying. For Jet Blue international flights, the maximum weight for checked bags is 50 lbs. Please stay well below that limit.

**Wildlife encounters:** With the exception of San Jose and CATIE, we will be staying mostly in clean rustic accommodations very close to or actually inside biological reserves. Costa Rainforests are home to thousands of species in insects, spiders, amphibians and reptiles, many of which are nocturnal. These are opportunities for you to experience wildlife in close proximity, maybe challenging you to expand your comfort-zone. If you have a problem with wildlife encounters in your room or elsewhere, don't panic or try to kill an intruder or "guest" in your space. These creatures intend you no harm and will not attack or pursue you unless they are mosquitoes. They are only instinctively looking for food or a suitable habitat. Both Carlos and I are experienced in working with wildlife and are available for "critter calls" if you need help. Make these encounters teachable-learning moments.

**Service Learning:** In La Fortuna, Chira Island and El Copal part of our days will be spent in service learning working with local people who are engaged in community-based ecotourism and agricultural enterprises. In the past these tasks have included trail clearing and maintenance, farming, carpentry, tree planting and sign-making . Some of the places we stay are rustic small hotels/cabins which operate on small budgets. This is a win-win arrangement, since they need our help and we get to see a side of sustainable development from their point of view and lifestyle and with the hands-on perspective.

**\*\* Service hours in Costa Rica are a required part of your coursework in IDH-4008 and cannot be applied to Honors College Service Hours.**

