

Syllabus: GEOG 410/GLST 410 Landscapes and Conservation in Costa Rica (3 cr.)

Winter break 2016-2017 (January 1-10-, 2017)

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Goals: Students will experience and interact with both nature and culture in Costa Rica, the country known for its strong ecotourism programs, world-class nature attractions, generally pacifist culture, and development issues common to Central America and the developing world in general. **Student Learning Outcomes** - As a result of this class, students will be able to:

1. Identify main ecosystems of Costa Rica along two gradients (elevational and coast-to-coast) as well as about 30 typical plants and animals that occur in those
2. Describe a few key social and environmental issues present in Costa Rican society today
3. Give examples of some marketing initiatives aimed at making Costa Rica a leading ecotourism destination worldwide
4. Apply concepts learned in readings and lectures to practical solutions
5. Analyze existing practices in urban and regional development from the environmental sustainability perspective
6. Combine materials learned from various experiences on the tour into a presentation related to a specific research topic
7. Interpret findings from the professional literature and course experiences in a critical and holistic way

Main topics to be discussed include:

- Biodiversity conservation across elevational and spatial gradients (Pacific Coast vs. central mountain ranges, possible excursion to the Caribbean side as well)
- Sustainable ecotourism development, in particular adventure tourism, small business approach, ecolabeling and ecotourism certification issues
- Community health, waste management and education issues
- Migration issues (including Nicaraguan migrants and resulting divergent incomes between the capital region and the hinterlands and between the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, also Panamanian and American influences on Costa Rican middle class)
- Urban and regional geographical issues that impact conservation (urban sprawl, suburbanization and gentrification, infrastructure planning and development, governmental role in promoting development, resettlement issues, influence of megaresorts on the small communities)

Readings:

1. **Required guidebook** to purchase. James Kaiser (2014). *Costa Rica: The complete guide*. – Available either as Kindle edition (\$10) or paperback (\$20) on Amazon. You need to

have access to this book while on the trip, so the paper version may be better, unless you have Kindle already and don't mind losing it in the jungles☺. The book is full-color.

2. There will be a few **required journal articles** and other readings that will be emailed to you. You will need to print those at your own expense (this is still cheaper than asking you to purchase a reading packet). Alternatively, you could load these into a tablet and have that digital reading with you on the trip. The files will be all pdf files. A few of these will have to be completed before class starts and brief reading summaries prepared for those. The readings will be book chapters, professional reports, or articles from peer-reviewed academic journals.
3. All students are also encouraged to buy a **Spanish language phrasebook**. Choose Latin American edition, if possible. There is one book that is specifically tailored to Costa Rican Spanish, however, this is really not necessary for basic conversation. We will learn a few common Tico phrases that are most commonly used.
4. **Supplies:** have a sturdy notebook and a few pens/pencils to write your journal daily. I recommend small format book (e.g., 4 x 5 inches or smaller) with hard cover. This way, you can write anywhere without needing a desk. Note that your journal will be collected at the end of the trip so if you want to take class notes bring a second notebook or take them in another section of the journal so that you can tear those pages out before submitting your journal for a grade. I also require you to get a pair of binoculars. If you don't have a set ready, let me know and we can ask around for you to borrow a pair. You will miss a lot of interesting birds and other critters without those. Also please see the general packing list recommendations below.

Student evaluation will be based on:

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| 1) Keeping daily entries in a journal | 20% |
| <i>More specific instructions will be provided to you in class</i> | |
| 2) Quizzes | 20% |
| <i>2 at 20 points each converted to 10% each</i> | |
| 3) Reading summaries | 20% |
| <i>Must be prepared based on readings before we leave for Costa Rica</i> | |
| 4) Research project and final paper | 30% |
| <i>Will be completed after we come back from the trip</i> | |
| 5) General participation (e.g., asking questions, staying on task, positive attitude, helping others) | 10% |

Itinerary, calendar plan and contact hours

Pre-trip orientation in the fall on campus:

- Meet in October to assess students' interests, Spanish competency, background readings and project topics – 3 hours
- Meet one more time to discuss readings and to collect essays based on those by November 30 1 hour

Day 1

Leave MSP in the morning, arrive in San Jose mid-afternoon and transfer to the hotel safety and general geographic orientation sessions. Brief walking tour of downtown: safety after dark. Optional dancing in the evening for those who want to go. 2 hours

Day 2

Work in San Jose on urban and regional issues with planned visits to selected city neighborhoods and the university of Costa Rica. Visit main city plaza, the Cathedral, a farmer's market, some shops and possibly one of the two museums. Discussion of local history and customs, why San Jose is a typical Latin American city in some respects and different in other respects (e.g., it is one of the safest and richest major urban areas, but has relatively few historical landmarks), environmental issues of the urban core (transportation congestion, role of parks, graffiti and urban architecture). Community health and gender issues. **New Year Celebration!** 6 hours

Day 3

Coffee plantation tour. Travel to Tortuguero by bus and boat (there is no roads in the coastal village on the Caribbean Coast). This is a hotspot for all sorts of turtles and shorebirds. Study Caribbean culture as different from the other parts of the country. Walking tour of the town and the turtle conservation center. Environmental issues related to beach tourism development. 4 hours

Day 4

Tortuguero national park and canals around it. Ecology of lowland Caribbean coastal communities. Introduction to the zonation of tropical rainforests. Tropical trees: typical architecture. Monkeys, crocodiles, turtles, lizards, herons, shorebirds. 6 hours

Day 5

Travel west to Sarapiquí –lowland rainforest area (slightly drier than Tortuguero) with aerial bridges, cocoa plantation tour, butterfly gardens, etc. Nicaraguan migrant issues. Optional: ziplining. Possible visit to La Selva biological station. Some extra fee for that may be required (e.g., walk with a guide on a jungle trail, or on aerial bridges, another plantation tour, etc.) Ecology of the rainforest is a major theme for this day. 4 hours

Day 6

Whitewater rafting in the morning. Travel to Arenal Volcano La Fortuna area geology of Costa Rica, why volcanoes are present, life zones as one travels from the base to the top, explain system of national parks and how it is different from numerous private preserves, make observations of a few key attractions on the way, visit to a banana or a pineapple plantation to discuss labor migration and environmental costs of production issues.

Quiz 1

4 hours

Day 7

Work in Arenal Volcano area with two nature experiences (e.g., Cierra Chato climb and waterfall or kayak on Lake Arenal) – how national parks in Costa Rica are unlike those in the United States (minimal signage, very low level of policing and amenities, relatively high admission fees), discussion of tropical biodiversity with introduction to major species of trees, birds, reptiles, amphibians and butterflies. Visit **hot springs** in the evening. 6 hours

Day 8

Travel west to Rincón de la Vieja national park, sometimes called Yellowstone of Costa Rica. A nature experience and a professional meeting (probably a nature preserve staff) – discuss cloud forests, their unique position in the life zones of the tropics, mention specific conservation concerns for the area, its unique history, private efforts to keep the area wild, tensions between old timers and new comers, environmental impact of being “too successful” as a world class ecotourism destination, meet with a local business owner who has become a success 6 hours

Day 9

Guanacaste province Pacific Coast – driest place in Costa Rica with some unique cowboy-type culture. Students will see coastal areas, some of which suffer from overdevelopment, others are relatively pristine. Palo Verde National Park trip in the morning. We will engage with local communities to better understand the existing pressures to develop more. Specific attention paid to wildlife viewing and resulting harassment issues (crocodiles, monkeys, sloths, toucans) near and inside beach resorts (some of the largest in the country). Enjoy the beach in the afternoon! 6 hours

Day 10

Quiz 2 and evaluations. Fly out of Liberia airport in the morning. Arrive at MSP in late afternoon.

Total contact hours: 44 hours

What to pack:

Costa Rica is intensely tropical. That means that daytime is exactly 12 hours and nighttime is another 12 hours. Sunrise is at 5:45 am, sunset around 5:45 pm, and it gets dark very quickly afterwards. The sun is very intense during the day. Heavy rain can happen anytime, although in the dry season it is much less likely. So you'll need:

- Sun screen, hat, dark glasses, lip balm
- Mosquito repellent (small bottle of non-pressurized spray or cream, whatever you can bring that is allowed on an airplane)
- A lightweight, but bright, flashlight
- A camera (or you can take pics with your cellphone, but I do recommend having a camera too)
- If you are on T-Mobile standard plan, you will have automatic free text and data in most places in Costa Rica, and 20 cents/minute calls anywhere inside Costa Rica. Calling back home to the USA will be more expensive. Some hotels have cheap or even free international calls. Check with your cellphone provider before you go. ATT phones may also work, Verizon and Sprint will probably NOT work, unless you have a GSM SIM card enabled and purchase a phone card. Wi-Fi is available in many places.
- Good quality rain jacket that doubles as a windbreaker (breathable, if you can afford one). Rain pants are optional
- Very sturdy and comfortable hiking shoes closed in front (no high boots needed, but your toes MUST be covered)
- Sturdy and comfortable hiking/water sandals with straps and, ideally, toes' protection (no open toes in front)
- Flip flops for the beach and the hotel OK, but not on the hikes
- Light-colored, light-weight long pants (2 pairs)
- Shorts (2 pairs)
- A light sweater, as it gets colder at night and at higher elevations
- Enough clean socks to last a week, although in many instances one doesn't need socks
- Enough clean underwear – we may have a laundry day once on the trip, bring a rubber stopper for a hotel room sink and a bit of detergent. Also pack a large size (2 gallon+) ziplock bag to do laundry in.
- Swimsuit and a small towel
- Some tops/shirts to impress the crowd. We do not need any formal wear, but you may want to dress conservatively, e.g., avoid very revealing clothes or items with large stupid gringo labels ☺ and have at least one or two items that have a collar. We will not go to restaurants that require formal dress
- Motion sickness medication (over the counter is OK, unless you get seriously car or sea sick)
- Any prescription medications you need
- A small sewing kit
- A small pocket knife that you can pack with your luggage
- Personal hygiene items
- A refillable water bottle: tap water is safe to drink anywhere in Costa Rica!
- Your luggage should be easy to travel with and not bigger than what you can handle yourself without extra help. I suggest a daypack (backpack) and a medium-sized rollable/Pullman type suitcase. Leave room for souvenirs to buy while there!