Costa Rica Experiences

January 2021
Honors: BIO 285: Costa Rican Biodiversity Studies and Research (3Hrs)
Field-research Intensive Programs Abroad
for Gatton Academy Students during Winter-Term 2021

Expense

The program cost is estimated to be $3,100—$3,600, including roundtrip airfare from Louisville, all lodging, two meals/per day on average, all ground transportation, all site visits, and three hours of tuition. Any student who has never used their one-time $1,000 Gatton Academy Study Abroad Scholarship will only pay $2,100-$2,600 for the program.

Itinerary

Because two groups of Gatton Academy students are in Costa Rica simultaneously, both groups rotate around one another since our host organizations are small and can only accommodate one group at a time. Therefore, while all visits are the same for both groups, the order of the itinerary is different for students in the Costa Rica II group.

Day 1
The group meets at a Louisville Airport-area hotel in the late evening for a pre-dawn, next-day departure.

Day 2
Fly from Louisville to Liberia, Costa Rica. Then, travel to coastal Playa Grande, about one hour drive away. Check into Goldring-Gund Marine Biology Field Station.
http://goldringmarinestation.org

Days 2-4
During these first days of the program, students spend nighttimes awake and researching with the field station's staff, patrolling Playa Grande in shifts, looking for the critically-endangered leatherback turtle, or keeping watch at the hatchery. Mornings are for rest. One afternoon will be spent in the tidal pools of the bay, wading and snorkeling, surveying habitat populations. On another afternoon, students take a boat tour through the local estuaries to spot wildlife like howler monkeys and crocodiles. Class meets each afternoon. Goldring Marine Biology Field Station hosts EarthWatch Expeditions and was named by *Travel+Leisure* as one of four sites to see "where the wild things still are" (Woodson 2006). Brunch and dinners are provided daily at nearby Kike's café.

Guest lecturer: Dr. Frank Paladino, Dir.of Goldring-Gund Marine Biology Field Station, Distinguished Professor at IU-Purdue Univ. Fort Wayne, and Pres. of the Leatherback Trust.

Day 5
Depart Playa Grande following breakfast for a seven-hour drive to San Gerardo de Rivas. Check into cabinas at Cloudbridge Nature Reserve (elevation approximately 6,000 ft).
Cloudbridge Nature Reserve: http://www.cloudbridge.org/
Guest lecturer: Tom Gode, Manager/Director of Cloudbridge

Days 6—10
Activities center around daily, morning research activities at Cloudbridge Nature Reserve. Days start with 7 AM breakfast at Cloudbridge. Students are assigned to a four-person research team and study projects in the cloudforest ecosystem of the Cloudbridge Nature Reserve, adjacent to the Chirripo National Park. Possible study groups include:
- Tree Diversity, Carbon Sequestration, and Climate Change
- Bird Survey of Cloudbridge
- Butterfly Diversity
- Dung Beetle and Litter Inverts
- Plant Diversity of the Costa Rican Cloudforest

Each group will have a field leader, but each student also has a significant amount of responsibility. Following breakfast, research teams promptly head out on the Reserve to work on their projects until lunch. Some days students may pack a lunch and work into the afternoon to visit more-remote areas of the Reserve or go into Chirripo National Park. Otherwise, lunch is served at the Cloudbridge base.

A high level of physical endurance is necessary for this program. Research teams will hike in remote areas with sharp elevation change.

Afternoons and evenings feature further discussions and observations on this diverse ecosystem and include local cultural activities. The group will make an excursion to the nearby city of San Isidro de General to visit market day, go on night hikes, attend a special dinner at a local family's home cafe, and take a forest art class. A daily evening seminar is held where students make individual presentations on assigned species and topics of environmental interest. On the final day at Cloudbridge, the 11th Annual Gatton Academy Research Symposium at Cloudbridge will be held at the Reserve classroom, where teams make 10-15 minute presentations to the class and the community.

Day 11
Following an early breakfast at Cloudbridge, the group will depart for Corcovado National Park on the Osa Peninsula, which *National Geographic* has called "the most biologically intense place on Earth." The group will make a two-and-a-half hour drive from San Gerardo de Rivas to Sierpe. From there, students will board a small boat to Poor Man's Paradise—only accessible by water—for the next three nights. The boat ride is around one-and-a-half hours. Students stay in Pacific-front jungle cabins. During this final leg of the trip, evenings are reserved for class meetings in one of the cabins.
Poor Man's Paradise: www.poormansparadiseresort.com/

Day 12
Students depart by boat at the break of dawn to Corcovado NP's Sirena Ranger Station for a full-day hike, seeing wildlife like sloths, coatimundi, howler monkeys, spider monkeys, white-faced monkeys, peccaries, crocodiles, caimans, bull sharks, iguanas, toucans, poison dart frogs, and if lucky, tapirs.

Day 13
Full day snorkeling excursion to Isla del Caño—one of the best snorkeling spots in Costa Rica. On the way to Isla del Caño, dolphins or migrating whales may be spotted. Snorkeling is done in a designated area of coral reefs around the island. After a beach break, students may be given the option to snorkel more or relax on the island's beach. Students head back to Poor Man's Paradise for lunch, an afternoon of relaxation on the beach, dinner, and evening class.

Day 14
The group will travel 1.5 hours by boat to Sierpe, followed by a 5-hour bus ride to San Jose for the next day's departure.
Hotel La Riviera: www.larivierahotel.com/

Day 15
Return to the USA flying from San Jose, Costa Rica to Louisville.