WELCOME TO UNO
COSTA RICA!

Participant Handbook
Dear UNO-Costa Rica participant,

You are embarking in the most exciting five week experience that any student could ever hope for. Costa Rica awaits you with its beautiful rainforests, its never-ending white sandy beaches, lush tropical plants, exotic animals and most of all, the most friendly, welcoming people you will ever encounter in your travels!

You are about to be a guest in a country which is in many ways quite different from your own. It has a unique culture which has evolved out of a rich past. Before you go, it is an excellent idea to briefly familiarize yourself with the history and culture of Costa Rica. Find out a little something about their current social and political issues. Take the time to learn the most important words of their language, "gracias" and "de nada". By having a general understanding of this land and respectfully showing an interest in their way of life, you will find that the people and places you encounter this summer open up to you as you never imagined, and you will experience Costa Rica in a way that no mere tourist ever could!

Remember to pack with you the most important elements for your trip: flexibility and an open mind. With these tools you will be able to truly experience what other cultures and people can offer you.

This handbook is designed to guide you and help you before and during your stay in Costa Rica. Please read it carefully and don’t hesitate to call upon our staff to answer any questions.

The staff and faculty at the University of New Orleans have worked hard to prepare your program and ensure that your stay is a positive learning experience!

You will soon learn why the people of Costa Rica greet you with Pura Vida!

Marie Kaposchyn
Program Director
THIS HANDBOOK GIVES OUR PARTICIPANTS AN OVERALL PREPARATION FOR THEIR SUMMER ABROAD EXPERIENCE. APPROXIMATELY ONE MONTH BEFORE DEPARTURE, A LIST OF TELEPHONE NUMBERS, ADDRESSES, AND CONTACTS IN COSTA RICA WILL BE SENT TO YOU. THESE ARE NUMBERS TO LEAVE WITH A RESPONSIBLE PARTY AT HOME SO YOU CAN BE REACHED AT ANY TIME IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:
All announcements will be emailed to participants of the program. This is also where any messages, extra field trips, and information about social activities are posted, so check your email daily!

ANXIETY:
It is very normal to feel anxious about your trip. Everyone is excited and nervous about the whole experience, so don’t feel like you are the only one. Calm down, rest, and be open to the wonderful experiences you will have in Costa Rica.

EMERGENCIES AND/OR EVACUATION PLANS: We do not anticipate any problems but as a safety measure, and in a case of an emergency, you need to know where to go, whom to call and how to report. When you arrive to San Ramon, you will be given a walking tour of the town and shown the different places that are assigned as official emergency meeting places. If there was an emergency, you will be able to use this plan in order to have a quick and safe group assembly. You’ll also be given a local emergency phone number to call, the local American Embassy numbers, as well as a plan to leave the country if necessary. It is important that you take these measures seriously and adhere to the instructions given by the group leader. All the possible emergency scenarios will be discussed and handouts distributed. Our office number (504) 280-7455 in New Orleans will be the official number for your family to call and get any pertinent information.

MEDICAL RESPONSIBILITY: As a student you should be aware that there are certain risks inherent in international travel and that the University of New Orleans, cannot assume responsibility for all or certain of your activities while traveling. You should also be aware of your personal medical needs and consult with a medical doctor before your departure regarding any personal needs while abroad. Also, be sure that you have completed the “Report of Medical History” form to the UNO-Costa Rica office.
It is a good idea to bring a few items that can make your trip more comfortable such as aspirin or Tylenol, Imodium AD tablets, Dramamine, Band-Aids, and any prescription you are taking. Take all medicine in your carry-on, not packed in your suitcase. Bring a copy of the prescription, since refilling it in Costa Rica may be difficult without the actual pharmaceutical name. Make sure that all medicine is properly labeled and bring enough to last you for the entire trip. If you use contacts or eyeglasses, it is a good idea to take an extra pair with you. Losing such items can be bothersome and hard to replace. Lastly, don't forget to bring sunscreen!!

INSURANCE: All students will be covered by a comprehensive study abroad medical insurance plan that is included in the cost of the program. This policy provides for accident, medical expenses, emergency medical and evacuation, repatriation of remains, and family assistance coverage. **Extended coverage at additional cost is also available.** A brochure fully detailing the insurance plan will be provided to each student well in advance of departure. This policy does not cover trip cancellation or baggage insurance. **Students will be covered for the duration of the program only: http://inst.uno.edu/insurance.cfm**

STUDENT REGULATIONS: As a participant on the program, you will be expected to comply with program regulations. These rules of conduct govern a set of citizenship standards: living together in harmony in the home, respecting your neighbors and the citizens of Costa Rica, avoidance of drunkenness, disorderly conduct, drugs, dishonesty, criminal acts, academic cheating, damaging property, etc. As a student on the program you are also governed by the University of New Orleans policy and procedures regarding students.

Students must conduct themselves in appropriate manner and abide by all policies outlines in the UNO Judicial Code: [http://www.uno.edu/%7Estlf/Policy%20Manual/judicial_code_pt2.htm](http://www.uno.edu/%7Estlf/Policy%20Manual/judicial_code_pt2.htm)

Cheating, plagiarism, and academic misconduct will not be tolerated.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: It is the policy of the University of New Orleans, on a flexible and individualized basis, to provide reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are strongly urged to inform us of their disability and specific needs for accommodations. Students with disabilities are also encouraged to contact their instructors to discuss their individual needs within the academic context of the class requirements.
SAFETY PRECAUTIONS: When traveling overseas, there are a number of precautions which you should follow in order to travel safely:

1.) Do not leave your bags or belongings unattended at any time.
2.) Do not let anyone give you something to carry when traveling.
3.) Never keep all your documents and money in one place and make duplicate copies of your documents (especially your passport).
4.) Always be alert to your surroundings and be cautious when traveling.
5.) Do not get involved in drugs and beware of becoming intoxicated.
6.) Let people know where you are going and when you expect to return.
7.) Have sufficient funds and/or a credit card on hand to purchase emergency items such as transportation tickets.
8.) Be cautious when you meet new people and never bring them into your home.
9.) Report any unusual activity or suspicious persons to the program director.
10.) Be aware of the political situation wherever you are. Stay away from places that are experiencing political unrest.
11.) Keep away from areas known to have large concentrations of residents aligned with interests unfriendly to the United States or its allies.
12.) Be conservative in your dress and never wear expensive jewelry when traveling.
13.) Don’t flash your money and be discreet when showing your passport.
14.) Keep away from political demonstrations.
15.) Avoid the media and don’t feel like you have to comment or give an interview.

These are just a few general rules you should be aware of. Most often, common sense will tell you what to do. That is why it is imperative that you avoid a situation in which common sense does not prevail—being intoxicated and using drugs.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR WHAT PARENTS/GUARDIANS/FAMILIES SHOULD DO IN ORDER TO INSURE A SAFE TRIP FOR THE STUDENT PARTICIPANT:

Parents/guardians/families should:

1.) Obtain and carefully evaluate health and safety information related to the program, as provided by the sponsor and other sources.
2.) Be involved in the decision of the participant to enroll in the study abroad program.
3.) Engage the participant in a thorough discussion of safety and behavior issues, insurance needs, and emergency procedures related to living abroad.
4.) Be responsive to requests from the program sponsor for information regarding the participant.
5.) Keep in touch with the participant while he/she is overseas.
6.) Be aware that some information may most appropriately be proved by the participant rather than the program.
SUGGESTED GUIDELINES OF WHAT PARTICIPANTS SHOULD DO IN ORDER TO INSURE A SAFE TRIP: Participants should:

1.) Read and carefully consider all materials issued by the sponsor that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in the host country.

2.) Consider their health and other personal circumstances when applying for or accepting a place in the program.

3.) Make available to the sponsor accurate and complete physical and mental health information and any other personal data that is necessary in planning for a safe and healthy study abroad experience.

4.) Assume responsibility for all elements necessary for their personal preparation for the program and participate fully in orientations.

5.) Obtain and maintain appropriate insurance coverage and abide by any conditions imposed by the carriers.

6.) Inform parents/guardians/families, and any others who may need to know, about their participation in the study abroad program, provide them with emergency contact information, and keep them informed on an ongoing basis.

7.) Understand and comply with the terms of participation, codes of conduct, and emergency procedures of the program, and obey host-country laws.

8.) Be aware of local conditions and customs that may present health and safety risks when making daily choices and decisions. Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.

9.) Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well-being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.

10.) Accept responsibility for their own decisions and actions.

11.) Become familiar with procedures for obtaining emergency health and law enforcement services in the host country.

12.) Follow the program policies for keeping program staff informed of their whereabouts and well-being.
As a participant on this program, you will be part of the only UNO "home stay" program. That means that you will be living with a family in San Ramon, Costa Rica for the five weeks. The forms that you completed regarding housing have been sent to the have been in contact with our host families in San Ramon who will be providing this stay for you. The families are Costa Rican middle class families and the location of the homes is within easy walking distance of the university campus. They are carefully interviewed by our onsite coordinator before being accepted to our program and most have been in our network for years.

Upon arrival in San Ramon you will meet with your host family who will immediately take you to their home. If, during the course of the summer program, you have any problems with your family, please contact the Program Director or the Academic Director of the program. We will do everything we can to make your stay in Costa Rica a pleasant one. However, we ask you to be patient and understanding. Home stays require a unique cultural approach by both parties concerned. We recommend that you bring your host family a small gift that is typically American. Even better, a typical gift representing your hometown. (Example: a picture book of your city, a basket of soaps, etc.). Do not bring CD’s, video tapes or other electronic items since you won’t know if the family has the equipment to use them. Also, do not bring bubble bath or bathtub related items since most households only have showers.

Please remember, the family is hosting you and making you part of their family. You will be given a key to the house and therefore you are responsible for it. If you lose it, it is imperative that you tell the family right away! After all, someone could find it and break into the home. Use your common sense! Also, you are living with other people in the household. Be considerate of this and try to adhere to their hours by not coming in late often and not waking up the entire family when you do come in late!

The most important aspect regarding home stay is flexibility. Don’t expect to have private bathroom facilities that you are used to at home (sharing is the key). The electric shower—the shower head is hooked up to a heating element that you need to switch to get hot water—will be most interesting. Don’t worry, you won’t get electrocuted.

The septic system in San Ramon is very weak and you have to take care of doing as the locals do. Flushing toilet paper is not common either (I know, we all had to get used to this). Most homes, and hotels, will have a waste basket with a closing lid to throw away toilet paper. Not our usual choice in comfort but less embarrassing than getting the entire host family to help you bail out water from the bathroom!
PASSPORTS: You should now apply for a valid passport. It can be obtained at any passport agency (look under "State Department" in the U.S. Government listings in the phone book), or major U.S. post office. You will need to bring proof of your U.S. citizenship (birth certificate or naturalization papers), identification (driver's license or your old passport), and the fee for the passport. It will be valid for ten years. Since the processing of your application can sometimes take some time, it is important that you take care of this right away!!

Losing your passport while in Costa Rica can be a major problem. Not only is it difficult to replace, but you will not be able to travel out of the country. In the event you do lose it, you should notify us immediately as well as the local police and the U.S. embassy in San Jose. To make the reissuing process much easier, photocopy the page showing your passport number, picture, and place of issue, and keep it separate from your passport. (You will need to send us a copy too). Leave a copy with someone at home as well.

VISAS: As a citizen of the United States, you need only a valid passport for entry. If you are not a U.S. citizen you must contact the Costa Rican Consulate office at least a month in advance of the trip regarding whether or not you need a visa.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: You should realize that anytime you travel abroad there is potential for danger due to crime, political unrest, unforeseen “Acts of God,” strikes that will delay your travel plans, etc. We simply cannot list every possible scenario in this Newsletter. Therefore, we recommend that, if you have any concerns about traveling to a particular place, you contact the U.S. Government Travel Advisory. This can be found on the internet at:

www.state.gov/

TRAVEL IN THE COUNTRY: Use your time wisely. Study, travel, and have a wonderful time this summer! As mentioned above under transportation, you will have ample time to visit various regions of Costa Rica. Plan ahead and see what you can during your stay. The more traveling you do, the more money you will need. But a primary reason for going on this program is to get to know the country. There are certain areas we will discuss during orientation that we strongly discourage you from visiting. These areas are not close to our program and are known to have higher levels of crime. We will cover this in detail during our onsite orientation.

Whenever you travel away from the group it is IMPERATIVE that you carry your passport with you. Random checks are made by the local authorities and you can be imprisoned if you do not have legal proof of citizenship.
ARRIVING PLANS:

Most students feel more comfortable flying “with the group”. It is not per se a group flight, rather once the staff or faculty representative books their flight, we send our itinerary to all participants and you can book yourself on the same flight. When you book your flight to San Jose, airport code SJO, please send us a copy of your itinerary. Try to schedule a flight that arrives before 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon. In the rainy season in Costa Rica, the airport sometimes shuts down because of fog that usually comes in after that time. There will be a chartered bus from the airport to San Ramon that will pick up the “group flight” or anyone else that arrives before that time. If you do not arrive in time for the charter bus, you will have to take a taxi to San Ramon on your own.

DEPARTURE TAX: Please be aware that most airports charge their passengers a departure tax. The Costa Rica departure tax is around $26.00 (this can change due to exchange rates). You need to put this aside in either cash (dollars or colones) so you are ready to pay this on departure day!

U.S. CUSTOMS: When returning home, keep in mind that U.S. Customs requires you to declare all purchases acquired abroad. Therefore, be sure to keep the receipts for all the major items you buy. You are allowed to bring back $800 worth of foreign goods tax-free. After that you must pay 10% on the next $1,000 worth. You must be 21 to bring liquor into the U.S., and you are allowed no more than two liters of wine or beer or one liter of higher proof beverage.

TELEPHONE CALLS, MAIL AND E-MAIL:

The phone numbers you will be given prior to departure are meant to be used for emergency purposes only. Keep in mind that sending or receiving a letter can sometimes take weeks! Use e-mail and Skype as a way to communicate.

During your stay, it is best to make your calls using an international calling card (do not purchase them in the U.S., they do not work in Costa Rica (make sure you get a card worth at least $10 to make international calls). Prior to departure, you will also receive the name and phone number to your host family. Have your family call you in San Ramon. **You are not allowed to make outgoing long distance phone calls unless you use a telephone card.** We do have Wi-Fi in our class building. You will also be able to access it in the afternoon after class, hours will be posted. There are also several internet cafes in San Ramon and rates are very low (about $1 hour). Be very careful with laptops, they are easily stolen.
MONEY: The official language of Costa Rica is Spanish. A large number of citizens do speak English particularly in San Jose. However, you will be spending the major part of the five weeks in San Ramon. Therefore, as best you can, learn some basic Spanish before you depart. If you already speak Spanish, this will be an excellent opportunity to practice your skills.

MONEY:
Oh, yes, that very important question....how much do I need? How do I bring it? You have several things to consider and carrying around a lot of cash is risky.

Credit Cards:
You can use ATM machines in San Ramon to get cash. If you intend on using them, make sure you have the proper PIN number with you. In case of a financial emergency, a debit or credit card can be very helpful. Bring with you a Visa or MasterCard. As far as purchasing power goes, however, credit cards are not of great value for the budget traveler because many low-cost establishments in Costa Rica do not accept them. Plan your spending wisely!

The safest way to carry your money and valuables is to wear them around your neck or waist either in a travel pouch under your shirt or in a money belt. These can usually be purchased at any good camping or travel store. Also, we know that you will get to trust your host families as your own, however you cannot control who comes in and out of the house during your absence. **Do not leave your money out in the open!** Keep valuables locked in your suitcase (combination locks are best) at all times.

HOW MUCH MONEY TO BRING? All students seem to have a different idea of what Costa Rica will cost and what they intend to spend during their stay there. A suggested amount of $150.00 per week is advisable. The best rule of thumb is to budget as much as you can possibly afford. You will have a much better time if you don't have to worry about every purchase. Take enough to cover your anticipated expenses and then a little extra. If you feel like you need a guide for spending money, you should first begin by calculating what you will already have paid for before you depart and what you will have to pay for once you arrive. If you are going over early or staying later on your own then you will need to consider transportation, food and lodging during this period of time in Costa Rica. Consider the costs of meals not taken with your family during the week and the costs of souvenirs, taxis and bus fares, and hotels during your free week-ends. By planning in advance you will be better prepared for your trip.
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: Public transportation by bus is excellent. You can get to most any part of Costa Rica by bus, the cost is relatively inexpensive. For official day and week-end field trips, transportation will be included. Some weekend field trips will be to rain forests. Please read over the listing of clothing and other items to bring. Going into such a forest demands that you prepare well for wet weather.

PARTIES: Yes, there will be plenty of those. Welcome parties, farewell parties, and going out at night in San Ramon (yes, there is a night life!). Use your common sense and know your limits, and don’t get involved in any situation where you feel uncomfortable. Be friendly but guarded as you would in your home town. Stay in groups and “blend in”. It is wiser to spend $1 in cab fare going home late than to risk it and walk home in unfamiliar surroundings. And remember, going out all the time is what takes up most of your spending money so be careful!

SPORTS: Costa Rica is an ideal location for outdoor activities. There are many parts of Costa Rica where you can go whitewater rafting, camping in a rain forest, zip lining, etc. If you participate in any of these sports, please use a safe, reputable company and bring the appropriate gear--within reason (i.e., jogging shoes, hiking boots, etc.).

MEALS: You will be taking all of your daily meals with your family. However, if you travel on your own during the weekend or on an organized class field trip over a weekend, you will be responsible for purchasing your own meals. More information and details on these trips will be given once the program is in progress. If you will not take a meal with your family on any given day, please inform the family well in advance not to expect you. They make such a fuss preparing meals for you, so let them know if you are not coming.

LINENS, BLANKETS, AND PILLOWS: All of these should be supplied by the family but you need to bring a large bath or beach towel with you.
ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES: American appliances such as hair dryers, radios, etc. operate on 110 volts. This is the same in Costa Rica. We do suggest, however, that you leave most strong electrical appliances at home. Powerful hair dryers have a tendency to blow fuses in some Costa Rican homes, so be sure to bring one that is small, light, and not too powerful.

LAUNDRY: Laundry in a foreign country can be a hassle. However, since you are staying with a family, the family is required by our agreement to provide for your laundry once a week. On occasion, be prepared to do some hand washing (especially to wash your undergarments). Also, there are no dryers and this is the rainy season! So be prepared to wait a few days for your clothes to dry. Don’t wash all of your pants at once!

LUGGAGE: Travel light. Travel light. Travel light. Refer to the listing of what to bring in the way of clothes and other personal items. Bring a small backpack or carryon for weekend trips. Always guard your luggage when traveling and don’t trust a new “friend” on the beach to watch your bag while you swim. This is a common ploy to steal your valuables. Ask another program participant to hold your things.

WHAT TO BRING:
Our best advice is to travel as lightly as possible. If in doubt, leave it out! Too many clothes and too much equipment quickly become an unwanted burden. The important thing to keep in mind is that YOU will have to carry what you bring for the five weeks. And remember, you will bring home more than you started out with, so leave yourself some room.

Since the weather in Costa Rica during your stay is called the "rainy season" you should plan accordingly. The mornings in San Ramon will be clear and warm with evening showers, sometimes heavy, lasting from a few minutes to hours. In order to prepare for this weather, we recommend you to carefully plan according to the following packing list.

1 sweatshirt
1 light sweater or sweatshirt (nights are cool and we have a volcano visit planned)
1 light jacket, windbreaker, or rain jacket (NOT a heavy coat)
1-2 nice outfits for going out at night
2-3 pairs of jeans/slacks
2-3 pairs of shorts (be careful, shorts are not usually worn in the city)
1-2 shirts
3-4 casual shirts and tee shirts
1 pair of dress shoes
1 pair of sturdy, but comfortable shoes for walking (hiking boots or rain boots if you have them)
1 pair of tennis shoes
1 swimsuit, beach towel
Socks, belt(s), plenty of underwear
Pajamas, a robe (you will be living with a family)

NOTE: A good rule of thumb is to remember that you will be wearing casual clothes 98% of the time. Since your clothes will be laundered, pack for a week and wash. YOU DO NOT PACK AN ITEM FOR EACH DAY OF THE FIVE WEEKS.

OTHER ITEMS TO BRING:

*sunglasses
*sun screen lotion (with a strong screening agent as the sun can get intense)
*1 large bath towel, washcloth
*a compact umbrella
*battery operated alarm clock
*a flashlight with batteries (This is a must for the rain forest and for blackouts that can and will happen)
*beach sandals or water shoes
*poncho or other field rain gear
*insect repellent (in non-aerosol containers)
*binoculars (optional)
*small water container (always bring a bottle of water on fieldtrips, you will get dehydrated)
*toiletries and bath items
*prescription medicines
*pens, pencils, notebooks (for class) although you can purchase those in San Ramon
*Small Spanish-English dictionary
*Combination lock for your suitcase (to lock valuables in your room)

*First aid supplies: aspirin, band aids, first aid ointment, Imodium AD, Dramamine (we have very long, bumpy bus rides for excursions), and any personal hygiene items.
There are several drugstores and supermarkets in San Ramon where you can purchase everything you need. However, you might not find your favorite brand so if you are tied to a shampoo or special soap...bring it with you!

And don’t forget to pack your most important thing.....flexibility! You will be experiencing this adventure with a group of students of different backgrounds and personalities, host families of a different culture and a totally new environment. Be patient, be flexible and enjoy!

Most importantly, always know where you have your passport, credit cards and/or travelers checks. You can survive with these three things even if you lose everything else. **Bring these with you on the plane in a piece of carry-on luggage.** Other items you want to include in your carry-on bag are your camera, medications (not liquids), **an extra change of clothes, and toiletries.** We don’t expect to be stranded but sometimes you need to plan for lost luggage. Remember to keep the size of these toiletries down to a minimum and **do not** pack sharp items such as scissors or nail files or liquids. Purchase travel/sample size personal items which can be found at most drug stores.

“He who would travel happily must travel light.”

-Antoine de Saint Exupéry, pilot and author

SPECIAL NOTE TO ALL PARTICIPANTS:

PRIOR TO DEPARTURE YOU WILL BE GIVEN INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR HOST FAMILY (ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS), EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES TO CONTACT THE PROGRAM DIRECTORS ABROAD.

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU GIVE YOUR FAMILY THIS INFORMATION.
WHAT TO DO ON TRAVEL DAY

When preparing to leave for the trip, be well rested and have all your travel documents easily accessible. Arrive to the airport at least **TWO** hours before your departure time.

1) Verify that all the information on your ticket is correct and **know** your flight times and connections. Everyone should have ample time to make connections.

2) **WHEN BOARDING YOUR FLIGHT IN YOUR HOME CITY, MAKE SURE YOUR LUGGAGE IS CHECKED ALL THE WAY TO YOUR FINAL FLIGHT DESTINATION: SAN JOSE.**

3) If for some unfortunate, unforeseen reason, you **miss** your connection in your home city, notify the airline counter **immediately** so that they can arrange a later flight. Call home, let them know your change of plans, and **have them contact us** with your new arrival plans.

**BE SURE TO SEND US A COPY OF YOUR ITINERARY AND THE TIME TO EXPECT YOU IN ROME. WE WILL SEND YOU DIRECTIONS TO YOUR HOUSING AND THE DIFFERENT TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS TO GET THERE.**

**BRING THIS BULLETIN WITH YOU SO YOU CAN REFER TO IT, IF NEED BE. MAKE A COPY OF THE CONTACT NUMBERS FOR YOUR FAMILY AND LEAVE IT AT HOME.** Closer to your departure time, we will send everyone a list of contact numbers in San Ramon.

**IMPORTANT!!!** There are three (3) things that you **absolutely must** have in order to make it from your home city to San Ramon and back again. You can get there without your iPod, without your camera, even without your **clothes**, but you cannot go from here to there without your

1) **flight information**
2) **your PASSPORT**
3) **and to a lesser extent, your money (credit cards or travelers checks)**

Those items should be attached to your person.

**BUEN VIAJE!**