

National Profile

ACI – ICYE Costa Rica



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Information on the host country | 3 |
| About ACI (ICYE Costa Rica) | 4 |
| Who is Who? | |
| Our support for your well-being and safety | |
| Support | |
| Pocket Money and travel reimbursement | |
| Volunteering placements Support..... | 8 |
| • PROJECTS WITH CHILDREN: | |
| • PROJECTS WITH ELDERLY PEOPLE: | |
| • ECOLOGICAL PROJECTS: | |
| • ECOTOURISM & RURAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS: | |
| • CULTURAL PROJECTS: | |
| • OTHERS: | |
| Essential info before arrival..... | 11 |
| Medical system | |
| Accommodation | |
| Transportation and travel | |
| Monetary system | |
| Practical experiences and expectations | |
| Regulations and Policies | 13 |
| Visa requirements | |
| Specific government regulations | |
| ICYE policies | |
| NC's long-term rules for the volunteer to sign | |
| Agreement on Participation: Volunteer and Exchange | 16 |

Information on the host country

History

Costa Rica has been inhabited for over 10,000 years, and while the indigenous population is now small, their legacy remains evident, such as in the perfectly shaped stone spheres found across the country. When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1502, he named the country "Costa Rica" (Rich Coast) after seeing the sunset over the coast.

Colonized by Spain, Costa Rica suffered under exploitation and disease, and after 300 years, it declared independence on September 15, 1821. The country was part of the Federal Republic of Central America until 1838 when it became fully independent. Costa Rica abolished its army in 1949, reallocating resources toward education and health.

Geography, Climate, and Biodiversity

Costa Rica borders Nicaragua, Panama, the Caribbean Sea, and the Pacific Ocean, and is divided into seven provinces, with most people in the Central Valley. The climate features a rainy season (April–November) and a dry season (November–March); temperature depends on region, with warm coasts and cooler mountains. Home to 6% of the world's species, about a quarter of Costa Rica is protected across 32 national parks and 51 wildlife refuges. Its highest point, Chirripó (3,821 meters), offers views of both coasts on clear days.

Political System

Costa Rica is a stable Latin American democracy with a presidential system; the President serves as both head of state and government for four-year terms. Its legislature has 57 members, while the judiciary, led by the Supreme Court of Justice, operates independently. Since abolishing its army in 1949, Costa Rica has invested in education, health, and social development, gaining international recognition for its peaceful stance and dedication to human rights.

Economy

Costa Rica's economy is driven by tourism, technology, advanced manufacturing, and services. Tourism alone accounts for nearly 8% of the GDP. Agriculture remains significant, especially coffee, bananas, and pineapples. Costa Rica is also a leader in medical devices and pharmaceuticals. The country has become a hub for multinational companies, offering bilingual and highly skilled labor.

Note that Costa Rica is often considered one of the more expensive countries in Latin America! Imported goods tend to be more expensive due to taxes and shipping costs. Also, the country is attractive to many expatriates, which has contributed to higher prices, particularly in popular tourist areas.

Culture and Identity

"Ticos" and "ticas" (the nickname for Costa Ricans) are known for their friendliness, helpfulness, and relaxed attitude towards time. They prioritize family and enjoy gatherings with extended relatives. The country is overwhelmingly Catholic, and religious traditions are central to Costa Rican life. Costa Ricans are quite patriotic, proud of their stable democracy, though new challenges are becoming an issue.

Typical Costa Rican cuisine revolves around rice and beans, especially in the traditional dish *gallo pinto*. Breakfast includes *gallo pinto* with eggs, tortillas, and coffee. For lunch and dinner, rice, beans, vegetables, and meats like chicken or fish are common, often accompanied by tropical fruits in refreshing *frescos* (fruit drinks).

It should be noted that Costa Rican cuisine features a vegan foundation consisting of rice, beans, and vegetables; however, most households primarily adhere to a meat-based diet.

About ACI (ICYE Costa Rica)



ACI (Asociación Costarricense de Interculturalidad) is a non-profit organisation, founded in 1967 with the mission of facilitating meaningful exchanges, volunteering opportunities, and other forms of non-formal international education.

Active full member of the International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), we are passionate about fostering personal growth by broadening horizons and cultivating open mindsets, while also encouraging collaboration and contributing to a more peaceful world.

At national level, ACI is part of the Federation of Social Organizations of Costa Rica (FOS). Moreover, ACI has developed partnerships with other networks and programs such as: The Committee of Coordination of International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), associate to UNESCO, The Alliance of European Organizations (ALLIANCE), WeltWaerts from the German government, and ERASMUS+ from the European Commission.



Who is Who?

ACI Staff members: We are a small team with big dedication, passion, and commitment!



Mariel Pinel
Executive Director
Former ICYE Volunteer in
France, 2005-2006



Luis Figueres
Administrator



Andrea Poveda
Incoming Long Term
Program Coordinator
Former ICYE Volunteer in
Finland, 2025-2026



Marcela Fallas
Program Assistant
Former ICYE Volunteer in
Germany, 2022-2023



Romeo
Supervisor of Wellbeing

Office hours: Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

We have a hybrid work model, with some days of remote work and others in the office!

Address: Barrio Tournón, San José, Costa Rica. De la ULACIT 150 metros sur, Federación de Organizaciones Sociales.

Address in Google Maps: [Federación de Organizaciones Sociales, Barrio Amón](#)





P.O. BOX: 1022-2050, San Pedro, San José, Costa Rica

Telephone: (+506) 4000-1256

WhatsApp: (+506) 8455-9351

Check out our Social Media pages, [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)!

We update it with current activities, and you can view further information and photos.

Our support for your well-being and a positive experience

Orientation Activity

All incoming participants (Short Term, Work-Camps, Groups, and Long Term) attend an Orientation Meeting or Seminar as part of the program requirements. This orientation will introduce you to Costa Rican culture, customs, security, life with host families, and/or volunteer placements.

The orientation may also include a Spanish course, which is mandatory for Long-Term participants, to help you continue learning the language. Long-Term orientation will provide in-depth information on Costa Rican history, administrative issues, host family life, customs, and your specific volunteer work placements.

Of course, we will also have recreational activities, as this is not a boot camp!



Mid-Term Seminar

After six months in Costa Rica, Long-Term participants will attend a Mid-Term Evaluation Seminar. Topics will include culture shock, family life, volunteer work and expectations, as well as support for further improvement.

Evaluation Seminar

The final seminar for Long-Term participants occurs a few weeks before returning home. During this seminar, we will evaluate your exchange experience, prepare you for “re-adaptation shock,” and enjoy one last fun time together. This seminar will be held alongside the outgoing Costa Rican volunteers.

Support

ACI staff provides follow up and ongoing support throughout your intercultural experience and in case of emergencies. You may also be able to participate in socio-cultural activities organized by ACI. For Long-Term Volunteers, the Orientation Seminar, Mid-Term Camp, and Evaluation Seminar are mandatory activities.

Pocket Money and travel reimbursement

ICYE Long Term Program Volunteers will receive a monthly allowance of approximately \$65 USD from ACI. Please note that this allowance is not payment for work but intended to cover basic necessities (e.g., personal hygiene items).

Also, volunteers receive transportation funds to get to their projects and return home when travel is necessary. This allowance covers only public transportation; it does not include private shuttles, Ubers, or taxis.

Volunteering placements Support

ACI offers a wide variety of work placements for international volunteers.

Below is a list of general project types and examples:

PROJECTS WITH CHILDREN:

These projects include daycare centers for children from low-income families, rural and urban schools, and more. Volunteers may assist with classroom activities, play with the children, organize events, and sometimes help in the kitchen or with manual work. Office work may also be included.

Examples:

- Escuela Laboratorio Emma Gamboa
- Oratorio Don Bosco
- Centro Infantil Manos Amigas

General tasks:

1. Accompanying children in class activities and various other activities
2. Assisting teachers with organizing and preparing materials and lessons
3. Helping with cleaning and tidying up

Accommodation for these projects is mainly with host families.



PROJECTS WITH ELDERLY PEOPLE:

Homes for the elderly provide accommodation and special attention. These are places full of life and energy! As with projects involving children, volunteers may also help in the kitchen or with other manual work.

Examples:

- ASCATE
- Hogar María

General tasks:

1. Keeping company to the elderly and assisting in physical therapy.
2. Organizing activities and elaborating materials.
3. Helping with cleaning and tidying up the home

Accommodation for these projects is mainly with host families.

ECOLOGICAL PROJECTS:

These projects often focus on protection and conservation, including work with endangered species. Please note, most ecological projects offer basic, rustic accommodation.

Examples:

- Natural Reserves
- SeaTurtle Conservation
- Spirogyra Butterfly Garden

General tasks:

1. Fieldwork (reforestation, species documentation, animal protection, trail maintenance).
2. Office work (e.g., translating materials or maintaining websites).
3. Environmental education for locals and tourists.

Accommodation for these projects is usually at the project site



ECOTOURISM AND RURAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS:

These projects combine environmental conservation with rural community tourism, providing volunteers with opportunities to engage with nature, integrate with local people, and participate in a variety of activities.

Other projects may involve farm work, including agriculture, animal care, and bioconstruction.

Examples:

- Cedrela Ecolodge
- Coffee Farms
- Finca La Flor

General tasks:

1. Assistance in reception of tourists or local visitors
2. Field work like gardening or harvesting
3. Farm animal care

Accommodation for this projects is usually at the project site

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROJECTS:

Non-governmental organizations promoting Costa Rica's cultural life may require volunteers with good communication skills and an open mind. A solid understanding of Spanish (at least intermediate level) is important for successful participation. However, placements in cultural projects are limited.



Example:

- ACI

General tasks:

1. Office work (translations, elaboration of material)
2. Support incoming and outgoing volunteers.
3. Facilitating socio-cultural activities (Language café, Cultural City Tour, etc).

Accommodation for these projects is mainly with host families.

Volunteers in these roles can meet many people from all over the World and gain insights into how international volunteer work and intercultural learning are managed. Let us know if you're interested in joining us at our office! 😊

OTHERS:

Less common volunteer opportunities may include working in universities, secondary schools, municipalities, people with disabilities or with drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs.

PLEASE NOTE!

When applying, you are applying for a volunteer area rather than a specific project. ACI will do its best to match your preferences for a relevant project, but it is difficult to guarantee placement in your first-choice project.

Also, changing projects or host families is difficult (except in emergencies or very special circumstances). We encourage you to adapt and give it a try, as first impressions may be challenging, but they can improve with time!

Essential info before arrival

Medical system

Your Health Insurance:

Upon arrival, your health insurance will cover costs at both public and private health institutions across Costa Rica. While private clinics may offer faster services, they tend to be more expensive, whereas social security services are more affordable, though they may take longer, especially as the system becomes more saturated.

Most hospitals have English-speaking doctors or staff available to assist with translation but host families, host projects or ACI can support when necessary. Upon arrival, we will provide you with specific details about insurance claims and hospital locations. Please keep in mind that in most cases, you will need to pay upfront and be reimbursed later. For emergencies, carrying a credit card is strongly recommended.

Accommodation

Volunteers will be accommodated either at their volunteer workplace or with local host families. Most ecological projects provide basic accommodation and meals, with volunteers typically sharing rooms. Conditions can be off road and rustic. Some volunteers live with host families, so it's important to adapt to their routines and respect their household rules.

Strong social skills, flexibility, and spending time with the family are crucial for a successful experience. Please keep in mind that host families are volunteers as well and some receive only a small allowance to assist them. This is not a commercial arrangement, and host families expect integration and adaptation.

Transportation and travel

Traveling throughout Costa Rica is generally uncomplicated; however, it is advisable to consistently consider both road and weather conditions. Local driving can be aggressive; pedestrians should cross carefully without relying only on traffic lights.

Costa Rica has an affordable and reliable bus network for both city and interprovincial travel. Check online for schedules and buy interprovincial tickets in advance. City buses run frequently; their schedule can be different in different parts but may vary on holidays.

For interprovincial terminals, especially in San José, Uber is the safest option, particularly at night. Uber and private transport are widely available and reasonably priced. Avoid traditional taxis as fares for foreigners may be inflated; Uber offers more transparent pricing.

- We recommend the unofficial app [Moovit](#), as a reference on public transportation, routes and bus stops.

Monetary system

In Costa Rica the official currency is “**colones**”.

Expect prices like Europe, with some exceptions, such as public transportation and fresh fruits.

Some examples:

| Product | Colones | US Dollars |
|------------------------|---------|------------|
| A baguette | ₡700 | \$ 1,34 |
| Milk (1L) | ₡1 080 | \$ 2,07 |
| Bottled water (1L) | ₡700 | \$ 1,34 |
| Cinema Ticket | ₡3 500 | \$ 6,69 |
| Dinner at a restaurant | ₡8 500 | \$ 16,25 |



Practical experiences and expectations

To help ensure a positive exchange and volunteering experience with ACI, please read carefully and consider the following:

- To be a volunteer in Costa Rica, 10 and 12 months' volunteers need to get the migratory status as “VOLUNTEER”. Please review the chapter “Visa Process in Costa Rica” in this guide and bring the necessary documents with you to Costa Rica. The complete documentation is required for the process.
- You could be living in very different parts of Costa Rica: the capital, big cities, small towns and rural areas, depending on the family's/ project's location. Host Family and Project Information can take time to be confirmed. Thank you for your patience. We do our best to coordinate everything. In case information is missing, you will get it during the orientation process.

Regulations and Policies

Visa requirements

The conditions for entering Costa Rica depend on your home country. All ICYE countries fall into 3 different groups.

Participants from ICYE countries in the 1st and 2nd group can apply for their volunteer visa once in Costa Rica, or start the process through our embassy in their home country. Participants from the countries on the 3rd group do need to comply with more requisites, please make sure to request the information.

| 1 st Group Tourist visa valid up to 180 natural days | 2 nd Group Tourist visa valid up to 30 natural days | 3 rd Group Consular visa valid up to 30 natural days |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Countries • New Zealand • Brazil • South Africa • Japan • South Korea • Mexico • United States • Peru | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolivia • Philippines • Taiwan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colombia • Morocco • Ecuador • Mozambique • Ghana • Nepal • Uganda • India • Nigeria • Tanzania • Kenya • Russia • Vietnam • Moldova • Indonesia |

The citizens of ICYE countries in the 3rd group need to obtain a CONSULAR VISA to enter Costa Rica. This visa is valid for up to 30 natural days. As soon as they enter our country, we will proceed with the volunteer status procedure just like with the volunteers entering with a tourist visa.

Nationals from this 3rd group will be able to enter Costa Rica without consular visa only if they already have a visa to enter the USA, Canada and/or the countries of the European Union, stamped in their passport and valid for a minimum of 3 months. In this case, they can enter Costa Rica under the same conditions as the citizens of countries in the 1st group.

IMPORTANT!!!

From August 2023 the Costa Rican government extended the length of stay for tourist to 180 days. You can read the more about this [here](#).

Short Term Program Volunteers / StePs or eco-socio camps (less than 4 months):

For STP many volunteers (group 1 or 2) can stay as a tourist in Costa Rica with a return flight or proof of onward flight within 180 days. (If you get permission to stay as a tourist for 180 days, if not you would need to renovate your tourist visa).

Long Term Programme Volunteers (more than 6 months):

- **6 months volunteers** (group 1 or 2) can easily enter with a tourist visa, if you get permission for 180 days from migration (this can be verified on the stamp in your passport upon arrival in Costa Rica). If you receive permission to stay for less than 180 days, you will need to renew your tourist visa. In any case, to enter as a tourist, you must have a return flight within 180 days or show proof of onward travel.
- **10 - 12 months volunteers** need to apply for a volunteer visa. It is essential to bring the following:
 - Police Record and Birth Certificate APOSTILLED
 - Two identical photographs (passport size) in COLOR
 - Photocopy of main page of the passport and stamp of entrance in CR
 - \$230 if you bring consular visa or \$430 if you will enter as tourist.
 - Bring the original passport to the orientation camp as well!

Requirements to enter CR:

Be aware that for entering Costa Rica as a tourist, you must have a return flight within 180 days (maximum) or show proof of onward travel. Please verify if your country is in the list allowed to enter Costa Rica as a tourist (most Europeans and USA) or if you need a consular visa!

For any question about the migration process, please contact the Incoming Area Coordinator: recepcion@aci-cr.org.

Specific government regulations

Local rules

Here you can find some rules that are good to know to avoid worries during your experience:

- Alcoholic drinks cannot be consumed in public spaces.
- Smoking is prohibited in public or enclosed spaces and bus stops (Law 9028)
- Drug laws are strict. Even small amounts of illegal substances can get you in trouble!
- Hunting wildlife and extracting protected flora and fauna are banned.
- Beach access is public, although some private properties may make entry difficult.
- Do not feed wild animals during your visit in national parks or if you see animals in nature!
- Camping on the beach is mostly illegal, unless it's a designated camping area.
- You must have a guide to visit some national parks. Please, do not accept illegal tours.
- Official taxis are red with a yellow triangle; unlicensed "pirate" taxis are not regulated.
- Uber is technically illegal but still widely used. Some drivers may ask you to sit in the front to avoid issues.
- Restaurant tips are not mandatory and a 10% service charge is usually included in the bill.
- Keep your passport or a copy with you. Police may ask for ID, especially in tourist areas.

ICYE policies

At ACI we engaged with the ICYE policies to promote a sustainable and secure volunteering program. Please find further information about the policies:

- [Code of Ethical Practice](#): a framework to guide ethical, responsible behavior by all bodies within the ICYE Federation. It is rooted in ICYE's values and mission to foster intercultural understanding and trustworthy international volunteering.
- [Greener Together](#): The policy is designed to guide environmental goals, strategies, implementation, and monitoring for the ICYE Federation and its National Committees over the coming years.
- [Care to engage](#): ICYE's safeguarding policy focused on preventing violence, abuse, neglect and harm towards children. It recognizes that many ICYE volunteers work with children and commits the federation to create safe, respectful environments for children in host projects, host families, and all interactions within ICYE programs.
- [Safer together](#): ICYE's policy to prevent and respond to sexual violence (including sexual harassment) across all its international volunteering programs. It applies to everyone involved with ICYE – staff, volunteers, host families, host projects, partners, board members, and visitors worldwide.

NC's long-term rules for the volunteer to sign

Agreement on Participation: Volunteer and Exchange

Dear Volunteers,

The success of your exchange program will depend very much on you and your attitude. Like any programmed, there are regulations and procedures to guarantee a positive experience.

Please read carefully the following conditions and send a signed copy!

1. I have read and agree to follow ACI National Profile and the ICYE Federation's Guide for Exchangees.
2. I am currently in good physical and psychological health. My Health Certificate provides accurate information, including preexisting conditions and health history.
3. I have the willingness and I will put effort to learn Spanish during my Program.
4. I have the willingness and motivation to work continuously on integration in the local Costa Rican culture (host family, project, local activities, etc.). I agree to adapt and respect the Costa Rican way of life and culture.
5. I accept the placement that ACI will provide me with. I am aware that I may be placed in a Host Family, Project, urban areas or small rural towns.
6. I will follow the Conflict Resolution process explained by ACI whenever I have a problem with my host project or family.
7. I understand that the Program is not for tourism purposes and I will not travel excessively.
8. I will not use ANY drugs, including "soft" drugs like marihuana nor I will do excessive partying or excessive alcohol consumption.
9. I understand that the orientation, mid-term and final evaluation meetings are compulsory. The dates provided in advance shall be reserved by the volunteers.
10. I am aware that my insurance does not cover ANY motorized accident while I'm driving. Volunteers should not drive and if so, I would need to get insurance on my own.
11. I am aware that I must respect and obey my host country's laws and will avoid trouble with authorities
12. I will have good communication with my family, project and coordinator in ACI. For security reasons, I will always inform ACI when I am travelling outside Costa Rica.

13. I accept that I can be photographed by my project, family or ACI. I am aware that these images may be used by ACI or its partners in their media. If I have any concerns about this or objections, I will notify the coordinator

Host families and projects

14. I will treat my family with respect as they are hard to come by and they are opening their home to me. I will accept the rules and conditions which can be very different in each case. I understand that host families are VOLUNTEERS and some are given only a small allowance to assist them. The concept is not commercialized. It is not a business for the families, and they are not a hotel.
15. I accept that changing host situation would be possible only under extraordinary conditions, with the due process and ACI's intervention.
16. I have the willingness to work with responsibility in my project. I will comply with the rules and conditions of my project.
17. I understand that the project counts on my reliability and my presence at work and that some projects rely more in my independent way of working and initiative.
18. I will respect the schedule and vacations settled by my project or will coordinate them with sufficient time. I understand that I will have 2 days of vacation for every month that I work on my project (a total of 12 days for 6-month volunteers and 24 days for 12-month volunteers).
19. I understand that changing the project is very difficult due to visa regulations and limited spaces.
20. I am prepared to work between 30 and 40 hours per week depending on the project. I am aware that in some cases I may be required to work on weekends.

Criteria for Exclusion from the Program

21. If the volunteer leaves the host family or project on his/her own initiative and without the prior due process with ACI.
22. If the project or family decides to dissolve the contract based on misbehavior of the volunteer.
23. If the volunteer is certified unfit for work by a doctor for more than 4 weeks due to accident, illness, etc. or if he/she is unable to work for more than 4 weeks.
24. If pre-existing physical or mental illnesses were not mentioned in the health certificate.
25. If the volunteers violate the law.
26. If the volunteer abandons the Program, he/she will be reported to the Migration Authorities and will lose his/her visa, can be deported or penalized.
27. Once the Program is over, the volunteer is not covered by the insurance and no parties involved in the Program have longer responsibilities with him/her. Also, migration authorities are informed about the exact end date of the Program.

Full Name: _____.

Country of origin: _____.

Date: _____.

Signature: _____.