



Budget Planner for Study in Costa Rica

To begin the process of determining your personal study abroad budget, you should cross-reference this guide with [Preparing to Study Abroad](#), [Money Matters](#) and the program costs listed on our website at www.ifsa-butler.org.

The information in this guide was compiled by staff in the IFSA-Butler Costa Rica office, and by current and former students. Despite years of experience, we have yet to create a “perfect” budget. However, if you’re honest with yourself about your expectations and lifestyle, this guide will give you a good idea of how much money you will need abroad.

All costs are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise stated.

Tips for Determining Your Budget

- When figuring your budget, enter the minimum amounts on which you think you could manage. Include items such as meals, personal expenses, entertainment and vacation travel.
- Estimate a second set of figures that are more generous. You might be able to afford the more generous projection.
- If your resources are more limited, go back and make selective adjustments based on close questioning of what you really need, what would be nice to have and what you could do without. Your final budget should fall somewhere in the middle.

The budget worksheet (see last page) itemizes costs you will incur in Costa Rica. It is in three parts: **fixed expenses**, which are expenses prepaid in the United States in U.S. dollars; **variable expenses**, which are mainly in Costa Rica and include start-up and term-time costs; and **vacation expenses**, which are expenses for any vacation travel in Costa Rica. We have also added a line where you should enter your personal resources, which you will subtract from your estimated expenses to determine a working budget.

Exchange Rates

The currency in Costa Rica is the *colón* (¢). To calculate the value of U.S. dollars from *colones*, multiply the *colón* amount by the rate of exchange, which you can find in the business section of any major newspaper or on the web at www.oanda.com.

Fixed Expenses

All students have the fixed expenses of the program fee and transportation to and from Costa Rica. Other expenses could include the [Tuition Payment Plan](#) enrollment fee and/or special tuition supplements.

- **Program fee:** See “Services Included in the Program Fee” in [Money Matters](#), but remember that your \$500 program deposit is credited to the fee.
- **Transportation costs:** Enter the cost of travel from your home city to Costa Rica. You are responsible for your return travel to the city from which your flight departs.
- **Tuition Payment Plan** (not applicable to all students): If you use the Tuition Payment Plan, enter the TuitionPay enrollment fee, which is \$55 for the year or \$35 for the semester.

- **Overload fee:** Some host universities charge a fee for taking more than the required credit, called an overload fee. These universities do not always tell IFSA-Butler about the overload fee in advance. If you plan to take an overload abroad, investigate the possibility of additional fees. You are responsible for overload fees if they occur. The *Student Handbook* you receive during orientation includes information on taking a full course load so you can avoid overloads and their related fees.
- **Cost of medical, travel and property insurance:** While in Costa Rica, IFSA-Butler provides a medical insurance and assistance plan, included in the program fee. However, you should review the plan to determine whether you need additional insurance. You might also wish to secure personal property or travel insurance. IFSA-Butler is not responsible for your personal property.
- **Passports:** The fee for obtaining a U.S. passport is \$135 or \$110 to renew an expired one. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date to ensure that it is valid for six months past the time you will be in Costa Rica.
- **Student visa:** Students studying in Costa Rica for one semester will obtain a temporary resident visa once in Costa Rica. This visa will cost approximately \$300-\$350, and fees are paid in Costa Rica.

If you plan to study in Costa Rica for two semesters (academic or calendar year), you will need to obtain a student visa, which may cost around \$400-\$450. The required documentation you must take with you to Costa Rica may cost between \$80 and \$150, and you may need to budget for mailing charges, and travel to and from state offices. The remainder of the visa fees will be paid in Costa Rica. This includes application and translation fees.

- **Exit tax:** All students must pay a departure tax upon leaving Costa Rica. As of August 2015, the cost is \$29, payable in cash, Visa or Mastercard only.

Variable Expenses

- **Personal items:** Here you might enter the cost of a new backpack or similar travel item. Estimate what you will spend on new clothing. You will want comfortable, color-coordinated clothes and shoes suitable for walking, but you should also plan on buying some items abroad. See the "Packing" section in your [Preparing to Study Abroad](#) book.

You should plan on only packing what you can carry. Mailing clothes to Costa Rica isn't feasible; used clothes won't make it past customs due to sanitary concerns and new clothes carry a high customs charge. If you can't carry everything you need in your luggage, you should budget for acquiring clothes and other personal items in Costa Rica.

- **Orientation:** During your orientation, housing, meals and some entertainment are provided. You might want to take a little spending money, perhaps \$60 for snacks, souvenirs and entertainment.
- **Textbooks:** The IFSA-Butler Costa Rica staff estimates full-year students will spend \$280 for books; semester students, \$140.
- **Emergency reserve:** Whether it's a credit card, a cash reserve or traveler's checks, it's a good idea to have something set aside for emergencies. You might want to consider \$250-\$350.
- **Meals:** Your program fee includes three meals a day. You might want to budget \$25-\$30 per week for snacks and meals on the run. A dinner out at a nice restaurant may cost around \$15-\$25, but a cheap meal may cost \$6.

- **Local transportation:** Most students in Costa Rica walk or take the bus. A round-trip fare to campus will cost about ₡500 to ₡700. Be sure to include additional funds for traveling to entertainment options. Taxis are readily available; they usually cost about \$15-\$20 between San José and Heredia, and at least 50 percent more to get to the suburbs. You can expect to spend approximately ₡25,000 a week on transportation, including trips to campus and going out in the evenings.
- **Personal expenses:** Students report personal spending at about \$30 weekly. They recommend stocking up on certain toiletries (which average ₡1,500 weekly) and prescriptions before leaving the United States. Toiletries in Costa Rica are expensive, especially contact lens solutions. In your planning, be sure to include laundry, postage, school supplies, photocopying, etc. Stamps for an overseas letter cost about ₡200-₡500.

Also consider the cost of purchasing a prepaid phone card once in Costa Rica. Costa Rican telephone cards are available in increments of ₡1,000 and can be used to call within the country or overseas. A phone call from Costa Rica to the United States from a postpaid phone may cost around \$0.14 per minute and from a prepaid phone around \$0.26 per minute with the local company (ICE). However, this price tends to increase during holidays and vacations. Generally, it's cheaper to have someone from home call you.

Cell phones are available to international students in Costa Rica. They usually work like prepaid phone cards. You purchase the phone and time cards; when you run out of minutes on your card, you just add minutes. Most of these phones can make and receive international calls and text messages. ICE (www.grupoice.com) is the main cell phone provider for international students. Once you arrive in Costa Rica and check their offer, you can decide if you want to get a cell phone. Past students report that cell phones are an affordable way to stay in touch while studying abroad. The cost to purchase a basic cell phone is between \$30- \$70.

Be sure to set aside money in case you need to visit a doctor or fill a prescription.

- **Entertainment:** Past students report spending about \$35 a week on entertainment. For some students, the cost of alcohol should be considered. A night in the clubs could cost as little as \$6 or as much as \$30, depending on your lifestyle. Some people find this to be a major budgeting problem!

A night at the theatre may cost from \$6-\$15. The movies are about \$6-\$11. The staff in the IFSA-Butler Costa Rica office can give you suggestions for entertainment that won't wreck your budget. Your host university ID will grant you discounts to several cultural activities.

Vacation Expenses

We highly recommend that you invest in a good guidebook. *Let's Go*, *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* are some of the best. They can help you find good deals on travel, lodgings, meals and entertainment, as well as help you create a realistic vacation budget.

- **Travel:** Most students travel by bus because it's one of the most inexpensive ways to see Costa Rica. Check with the IFSA-Butler Costa Rica office for their advice on the cheapest and safest ways to travel.
- **Accommodation:** Your program fee includes housing with a host family throughout the program as long as classes are in session and during short university breaks. Students staying over the Costa Rican summer (December-January) must find alternate accommodation and/or luggage storage. Our offices abroad cannot store luggage.
- **Meals:** While traveling, you'll eat most of your meals in restaurants, so you might want to estimate \$15-\$25 a day, not including beverages. Food costs more during popular vacation times, especially the summer.
- **Personal expenses:** The telephone call component of your budget will be higher during vacation periods than in term time, but other expenses should be about the same. Entertainment and recreational expenses

will vary. You will obviously need less if you're backpacking and hostelling than when staying in city hotels. It's difficult to gauge how much you'll spend on clothing and gifts, but keep in mind you must carry (or ship) all those purchases home at the end of your program.

Approximate Costs of Commonly Purchased Items in Costa Rica

Now you're ready to begin your budget planning. The cost estimates in this guide are in Costa Rican *colones* (¢). Check the current exchange rate by consulting the business section of any major newspaper or www.oanda.com.

Keep in mind that 1000 g = 1 kg = 2.2 lbs

Groceries

Liter of milk	¢500-¢1,000	Peanut butter	¢600-¢3,000
Cheese	¢1,620-¢12,000/ kg	Beef/steak	¢4,345/kg
Eggs	¢1,890-¢2,260/kg	Apples	¢450/unit
Yogurt	¢860 (snack size)	Oranges	¢250
Juice	¢850/L	Potatoes	¢2,000/kg
Soda	¢450-¢600	Bananas	¢50-¢100/unit
Tea	¢1,400-¢2,600	Lettuce	¢300-¢450/unit
Coffee	¢960-¢5,000	Sugar	¢800/kg
Bread	¢500-¢1,300	Potato chips	¢300-¢1,300

Personal Items

Contact lens solution	¢7,800-¢15,000	Box of 10 tampons	¢2,000
Deodorant	¢1,800	Hair dryer	¢13,000-¢60,000
Toothpaste	¢1,790	Picture developing	¢1,775-¢1,920
Shampoo/conditioner	¢2,350/¢5,000	Clothing iron	¢800-¢1,400
Soap	¢430-¢950	Avg. box of detergent	¢1,960-¢3,400
Cigarettes (20)	¢850	Haircuts	¢8,000-¢15,000

Entertainment

Movies	¢2,900-¢4,000
Theater	¢2,500-¢60,000
Museum or gallery	¢2,500-¢7,000
Cup of coffee	¢500-¢1,500
Quick meal	¢2,750-¢6,000
Beer in a bar	¢1000-¢1,750
House wine by the glass, in a pub or wine bar	¢1,800-¢2,300
Alcohol/mixed drinks, by the glass in a bar	¢2,500-¢4,000
Alcohol/mixed drinks, by the glass in a club	¢2,500-¢5,000

Transportation costs—see amounts in preceding, appropriate sections.

Budget Worksheet—Costa Rica

Study Abroad Program: _____ Current Exchange Rate: _____

Fixed expenses

Program fee (see your program fee sheet)	\$ _____
U.S. domestic and round-trip transportation	\$ _____
Medical, travel and/or personal property insurance	\$ _____
Passport fee (first time or renewal)	\$ _____
Student visa/Temporary Resident visa	\$ _____
Exit tax (<i>impuesto de salida</i>)	\$ 29 _____
Tuition Payment Plan enrollment fee*	\$ _____

*may not apply

Total fixed expenses **A \$** _____

Variable expenses

Personal items (clothing, luggage, etc.)	\$ _____
Orientation spending money*	\$ _____
Textbooks (see your program fee sheet)	\$ _____
Emergency reserve fund*	\$ _____
Meals	\$ _____
Local transportation	\$ _____
Personal	\$ _____
Entertainment	\$ _____

*estimated costs

Total variable expenses **B \$** _____

Vacation expenses (Check with travel professionals and/or guidebooks)

Travel costs (bus, airfare, etc.)	\$ _____
	\$ _____
Accommodation	\$ _____
	\$ _____
Meals	\$ _____
Personal, including entertainment	\$ _____

Total vacation expenses **C \$** _____

Total estimated expenses (add lines A, B, and C) **D \$** _____

List personal resources available, such as savings, family contribution, financial aid, summer earnings, etc.:

Total estimated resources \$ _____

Less total estimated expenses (line D) \$ _____

Equals total surplus \$ _____

You may want to double this amount just to be on the safe side while you're abroad.