

Dear 2024 Au Sable STAD student,

Welcome again to the Au Sable Institute Sustainability, Tropical Agriculture, and Development (STAD) course in Costa Rica! We are looking forward to meeting you and we are confident you will find this course a great learning experience.

This letter should answer *most* of the questions you may have. **Please read it carefully before you pack.** For any additional questions, please email our Admission manager, admissions@ausable.org.

Arrival and Departure:

The STAD May course formally runs from 8 AM on Monday, May 20 to Friday, June 7, 2024. However, to allow for acclimation and a day of rest before the course begins, **we would like you to arrive the Saturday before class (May 18)**. In addition to arriving on Saturday, May 18, please arrive before 4pm.

The San José airport code is **SJO**. The formal name is **Aeropuerto Juan Santamaria**, and is in **Alajuela**, a city adjacent to San José. Any of these names may appear on your itinerary, but you are still flying into **SJO**.

Au Sable will email you a google spreadsheet in April to collect flight information. By May 1st, if you haven't already, please fill this out with your **(1) flight (airline and number) and arrival time, (2) the cell phone number you prefer to use, and (3) the email address(es) you prefer using all summer**. If your cell phone doesn't have service in C.R., it will be no problem. SJO is a small airport, with one exit from baggage claim for international flights, making it easy to find people.

It will work best if everyone is able to get **departure tickets for June 8 so we can combine shuttles to the airport**. If that is not possible, we can work with you to accommodate your flight departure time. Your departure date can be a little more flexible.

When you arrive

On the plane you may receive a Customs form to fill out and keep with your passport. Write "Vara Blanca, Heredia, Finca Ecoguardianes" as your destination. Once off the plane, go straight through to Immigration because lines can get long quickly. There are bathrooms just past Immigration, as well as before but if you can, try to go on the plane because otherwise you can get held up by a long line at immigration. If you are early, then no problem. Take your time. After Immigration, you will collect your luggage from baggage claim and proceed through Customs / Aduana where you will hand them the Customs form you filled out on the plane and place all your bags on the conveyor belt to be scanned. Most or all the officials in Immigration and Customs are bilingual.

Once Customs/Aduanas has cleared you and your luggage, you will exit through the only exit doors there are. Go past all the taxi drivers, etc., and don't accept any offers for someone to carry your luggage. Look for our faculty or staff holding an Au Sable sign. If you don't see an Au Sable sign, just exit completely, and go to the right. We will also be looking for you!

There is also a restaurant – La Malinche – about 100 m to the right of the Customs exit where you can get a snack. This is where we will wait if there are several Au Sable students arriving around the same time.

First Sunday

Sunday, May 19, will be a rest day to acclimate to the 6,000 ft altitude and climate before class begins. We will do a worship time together, outdoors weather permitting. The first Sunday afternoon often works well for a short hike up to a ridge that overlooks Poas Volcano at one end of our valley, the town of Vara Blanca and its tiny suburb, San Rafael de Vara Blanca.

Entry Requirements for Costa Rica

You will need a valid passport to enter the country of Costa Rica. If you do not have a passport, please apply as soon as possible as it takes 2 to 3 months to process a passport application. To learn how to apply or update, visit: [U.S. passports | USAGov](#) or [How to apply for an adult passport in Canada - Canada.ca](#). If you have a passport already, please check the expiration date as your passport has to have more than 6 months before expiring to be valid.

Shared Responsibility and Community Expectations

The Au Sable Institute will follow health and safety protocols for COVID-19 outlined by US or Costa Rica. Our ability to offer a residential experience and in-person instruction depends, in part, on students, faculty and staff following the safety protocols outlined in this letter. This means that as members of the Au Sable community, each of us, individually and collectively, must do our part to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to abiding by the policies in this letter, students must commit to the following pledge of shared responsibility: *“It is my shared responsibility to do my part to take care of myself and others. I will be flexible in ever-changing circumstances, adapt to new norms, and adhere to public health requirements in an effort to protect the most vulnerable among our community. I commit to the policies outlined in this letter.”*

COVID Vaccination

At this time, Au Sable is not requiring the COVID vaccine to participate in our STAD course. However, it is highly encouraged as it has been proven to reduce the seriousness of illness.

Traveling and arriving in Costa Rica

It would be wise to travel with a mask to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. While most people do not wear masks in public anymore, knowing how disruptive a COVID infection could be to your Costa Rica experience, we highly recommend wearing a mask in the airport and during your flight.

Symptomatic testing for COVID-19

If at any point during the course a student experiences symptoms of COVID-19, a rapid COVID test will be conducted. We expect students to self-report symptoms. If a student tests positive for COVID-19, we will follow current CDC guidelines for isolation and quarantine.

Acknowledgement of Risk

Each student deciding to participate in programs at Au Sable Institute will do so with the acknowledgement of risk outlined here: *“I understand that COVID-19 is a contagious and potentially life-threatening illness. I understand that Au Sable is implementing COVID-19 safety protocols to mitigate the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 on its campuses, but despite these protocols, participating in courses at Au Sable could expose me to COVID-19. I acknowledge the risks involved and choose to participate in courses this summer at the Au Sable Institute.”*

Documentation for Costa Rica

Au Sable will enroll students into the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) with the US State Department. This will notify the US embassy in Costa Rica of your travel to Costa Rica and is a helpful program in case of an emergency during your time in Costa Rica ([Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(state.gov\)](https://state.gov)). **For Au Sable to enroll you, we require you to email admissions@ausable.org a color copy of your passport, if you did not upload this as your government issued ID at the time of registration.** A copy will be kept at the Au Sable main office in case of an emergency. Once you are no longer participating in the Au Sable STAD course, this documentation will be shredded.

Emergency Numbers in Costa Rica

You should download **WhatsApp** on your phone for easy communication with your family, in case of an emergency. However, we highly recommend not using this app for constant texting and calling during your time in Costa Rica. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity that we encourage you to soak up as much as you can. When adding international numbers on Whatsapp make sure to always add a “+” in front.

Additional Health Insurance

Au Sable will purchase additional travel medical insurance through International Medical Group (IMG). This will cover you from the moment you leave for Costa Rica to your return to your home country. This insurance is secondary to your own personal health insurance plan. More information will be sent prior to your departure. If you have specific questions about this plan, please reach out.

How to pack for STAD:

Attached is a Packing List for your time in Costa Rica. However, please read these helpful hints/guidelines:

Clothing: Pack light, washable clothes that dry easily and layers for chilly nights. Clothes that are easy to hand wash and dry well outdoors during all-too-brief periods of sunshine work best. Plan for limited access to washers & dryers. When the sun is out, even heavy cotton fabric dries well on a line, but it may rain all day. Quick dry clothes work best, or clothes that are not 100% cotton.

We will be doing farm work and will be on farms, so please bring field clothes. Costa Ricans dress very similarly to North America but like to look well-groomed. Pack a modest swimsuit for swimming in the Caribbean and/or Pacific or possibly in some mountain rivers. And pack for the

climate(s) we will be in! Being cold and wet is no fun, **so pack smart but light**. For example, bring one lightweight sweater to add a layer if we have a rainy and chilly night.

Climates to expect:

Highlands: Vara Blanca is at 6,000 ft / 1830 m elevation – weather commonly ranges between “humid” and “raining” (average 30 in / 76 cm per month in May and June). Rain is sometimes very heavy, so be prepared in case we have some days of continuous rain.

Temperatures are comfortable in the day to cool at night (average 75 F/24 C; highs in low 80s F / high 20s C to lows in low 60s F / low 70s C at night).

Lowlands: This course has typically done two road trips to low elevations during about 1/3 of the course. We are still finalizing options for this, and the final version will depend on any active COVID regulations. Expect it to be humid with frequent rains, but hotter. For the Caribbean lowlands region, expect highs in high 80s F / low 30s C; lows at night around 70 F / 20 C; for the western lowlands, temperatures would be hotter - expect highs in mid 90s F / mid 30s C to lows at night in low 70s F / low 20s C.

ADE requests no shorts, tank tops, or flip flops in Vara Blanca. Hiking shorts are fine in the humid lowlands, but gym shorts will mark you as a tourist. Snakes, scorpions, and biting / stinging ants are rare in the highlands, but present in the lowlands, so it is best to bring shoes/sandals that protect in all the ecosystems we will visit.

Pack one set of nicer clothes for church, and/or a high school teach-in or similar. We will be attending churches and doing a service project in-person in a community. Bring one washable outfit that isn't field biology clothes for this purpose. “Office casual”, including nice jeans (men or women) or a knee-length skirt, is fine. In general, people in Costa Rica dress informally but look well put together.

Luggage. Limit your packing to one suitcase or duffel. Include a small collapsible pack or bag you can use for our road trips to the humid lowlands. If our two road trips work out, the longest would be 4 days/3 nights. Avoid a big hard suitcase if possible. A soft duffel bag or similar makes packing the van easier. A yummy prize is given to the best packed bag. Remember, simple is best.

Bedding. ADE will provide blankets and pillows. Please bring a [white cotton twin sheet set](#) (click for example) to sleep on that will be left with ADE as a donation at the end of the class. If you prefer a sleeping bag, bring one for chilly, damp nights that are never below 40 F / 10 C as winter camping sleeping bags will be too hot!

Medicines. Au Sable will send you an emergency and health document for you to fill out. **Please fill this out, accurately, so we know of all medical conditions and medications you take.** That includes any food allergies, allergies to stinging insects (bees, ants), diabetes, etc. This is for the sake of your health and safety. Costa Rica is a modern country with a good healthcare system, but we are staying and will be traveling in rural areas an hour or more from major hospitals. **Bring any medications that your doctor has prescribed.** If you carry an EpiPen, please bring it with you, and inform someone where you keep it, in case of an emergency.

A Request and a Reminder

We're not in Costa Rica to watch American or Canadian TV or movies. Soak up the experience and take all the opportunities you have during your time in Costa Rica to get to know each other and the place. You will not regret living in the moment and experiencing all Costa Rica has to offer! Plan to "unplug and disconnect" and enjoy your short time in Costa Rica.

Readings

Readings will almost all be in electronic format. Dr. Nord will post these before the class begins, along with the syllabus so you can read ahead if you like. He will be in touch when he posts them to Populi where you can access them. **Please download all your readings before you arrive to Costa Rica.**

Summer Internship in Costa Rica?

Some schools in the Au Sable network require international experience as part of an undergraduate degree. If that's you, consider staying on with ADE for a few weeks to live with a family in Vara Blanca, learn more about agriculture working on a mountain farm, and eating the most farm-fresh meals you've ever had. Even if this isn't a requirement at your school, if you're serious about gaining speaking fluency in Spanish or gaining hands-on experience in tropical agriculture, a short- or long-term internship with ADE after the STAD course is a wonderful opportunity. For more details and inquiries, contact admissions@ausable.org.

We are looking forward to your time in Costa Rica and are excited to have you as a part of the Au Sable Community. Thank you for joining us.

(packing list below!)

Au Sable Costa Rica Packing List

Clothing

- Shirts
- Work or field Pants/Jeans (no leggings) that can get dirty
- One set of nicer casual dress clothes (i.e. for males: polo and khakis, for females: long skirt or nice jeans and nice shirt)
- Sweatshirt
- Lightweight Rain jacket (good quality!)
- WARM sleepwear for Vara Blanca (nights are cold!)
- Hat for sun and or rain
- Socks
- Undergarments
- Modest bathing suit (no bikinis, must be a full coverage bathing suit)
- House slippers/indoor sandals (it is cultural to always wear shoes in the house)
- Good boots for walking and/or working in agriculture (If desired you can buy traditional rubber boots in Costa Rica for \$20 your size.)
- Light weight shoes that can get dirty (such as a tennis shoe for everyday use)

Toiletries

- Shampoo
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush/Toothpaste
- Sunscreen
- Insect Repellent (anything over 70% DEET is NOT necessary and is bad for your skin, the environment, and your gear!)
- Personal Medications
- Other personal needs

Other Essentials

- White Cotton [Fitted Sheet](#)
- Pillowcase, if buying set already included
- Quick dry towels (for bath and beach)
- Laptop computer (required!)
- Camera
- Passport and color copy of passport
- Daypack or backpack for day trips
- Bible
- Sunglasses
- Water bottle
- Flashlight/headlamp with extra batteries

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- Cell phone with alarm clock or small alarm clock
- Small notebook for field notes
- Larger notebook for lecture notes
- Pen/Pencils
- Money or debit/credit card for incidentals, additional books, souvenirs, coffee or baked goods, etc. ATMs are widely available.

Other Options and/or Suggestions

- Binoculars
- Travel friendly games for evenings
- Spanish/English Dictionary

Helpful Information for packing and planning

- **Pack light, hand-washable clothes that dry easily and layers for chilly nights!** Clothes that are easy to hand wash and dry well outdoors during all-too-brief periods of sunshine work best. Plan for limited access to washers & driers. Quick dry clothes work best, or clothes that are not 100% cotton. Also, you will be doing farm work and will be on farms. Bring clothing that you can get dirty and work in, but do not bring raggedy clothing as we want to look presentable.
- **ADE requests no shorts, tank tops, or flip flops in Vara Blanca.** Knee length hiking shorts are fine in the humid lowlands, but short gym shorts will mark you as a tourist, so please leave those at home.
- Costa Rica has plenty of stores for any incidentals, including a general store in Vara Blanca.
- ADE has rubber boots of many sizes for when we're doing farm work
- Electricity is the same as in the U.S. & Canada, 120 V, and available everywhere we will go for laptop & phone recharging, blow-dryers, etc