

Telephone

Public telephones are available in Buenas Aries. Fundacion Durika also has a cell phone for emergencies. Trip leads will carry both international cell phones and multiple radio walkie-talkies during the trip for communication purposes and in case of emergency.

Internet

There is limited Internet access at Durika (available to instructors, but not to students). There is no cost, but access must be shared amongst multiple users.

Money and Banks

The Costa Rican currency is the colon. Money must be changed either at the airport or at a bank in San Jose (there are no banks or ATM machines in Durika, and traveler's checks are generally not accepted in these and other small towns). Trip leads and students will need to exchange money while in the U.S. or in San Jose. Note that the payment to Fundacion Durika includes all lodging and meals. Participants only need covert enough money to cover incidental expenses (food, drinks, souvenirs, etc.). Trip leads will carry additional local currency in case of emergency.

Medical Attention

Durika has a resident doctor, dentist, and nurse. Durika residents, interns and staff are also trained in first aid and are able to provide medical assistance in the case of accidents. The closest health clinic is in Buenas Areas, which is roughly 10 miles from Durika, but nearly a 45 minute drive due to mountainous terrain. The nearest hospital is in San Isidro, roughly 30 miles north of Buenas Areas and an additional 45 minutes by car. Public hospitals in Costa Rica provide free basic medical services to foreigners, and Costa Rica is generally regarded as having one of the best medical systems in Latin America. All students participating in the trip will be required to show proof of medical insurance, and to purchase traveler's insurance in the event that they require advanced medical care or emergency evacuation to the United States.

Language & culture

Costa Rica is a Spanish speaking country. However, in many places you will find people who speak some or plenty of English, and it is quite possible to get along with minimal Spanish. The people are used to tourists, and are very helpful. We recommend that you invest some time in learning at least some basic Spanish to facilitate your journey, and out of respect for the local people. Lonely Planet's Costa Rica Spanish Phrasebook is an excellent, inexpensive introduction to the language. Instruction at Durika will be taught by Solar Energy International in English, with Spanish translation for local participants.

Ticos, as Costa Ricans are often called, are generally easy-going, open, helpful, and fun people. The country's tranquil nature shows through in all aspects of the culture. Since 1949, the country has been without any armed forces. Costa Rica, despite its relatively small size, has an incredibly diverse geography. A series of volcanic mountain chains run down the center of the country. The highest point is Cerro Chirripó, which reaches 3,820 meters high, rivaling some of the taller mountains in the United States. The variety of flora and fauna found throughout the country is remarkable for a country so small. It is a nature lover's paradise. Though not quite as "advanced" as the United States, Costa Ricans enjoy a life expectancy similar to that of Americans, perhaps a result of a more laid back lifestyle, and a healthy dose of fish, rice, and beans.

What should I Wear & Bring?

Durika in May will be generally warm and humid. It is the start of the rainy season in Costa Rica, so students should be prepared with rain gear in the event of a storm. The Community itself is at elevation, so at times there can be strong winds, and the temperature frequently drops significantly in the evenings. We recommend traveling as lightly as possible. Resist the temptation to bring everything you think you might possibly need. Light, long sleeved shirts and pants are recommended for sun, insect protection. Dressing in layers works well for evenings when it might be somewhat cooler. In the tropical climate, darker clothes will make you hot and attract bugs. Bring plenty of underclothes, and clothes that wash and dry easily. Heavy jeans are thick and take an extremely long time to dry in the humid, tropical climate where you will be staying.

Bring a good hat to shade your eyes and forehead and to keep your head dry if it rains. If you are light skinned or very heat sensitive, bring a wide brimmed hat. You will be in a tropical forest, and we will be doing physical work, so make sure you bring a pair of shoes that you don't mind getting dirty. A pair of rugged sandals or sport shoes that dry easily are useful for wading in water. Rubber boots are also popular in Costa Rica, and frequently worn by Ticos. Many former students have found that water resistant hiking boots work well on mountainous terrain. Work gloves may also come in handy for our projects.

In general, we recommend that you carry your gear in a large, internal frame backpack. It's less tiresome to carry your load on your back, although you have to be aware when in crowded places. Make sure that you chose a good quality pack that won't rip, break or become damaged in any way as it may get "tested." In addition, a smaller backpack is useful when doing shorter day hikes.

Here is a list of smaller items that you may find useful:

- Small flashlight or headlamp with spare bulb and batteries (rechargeable)
- Travel alarm clock or watch
- Swiss Army-style pocketknife
- A section of cord or line (clothesline or for a thousand other purposes)
- Sewing kit
- Sunglasses (good ones as the sun is very strong)
- Toiletries (use soaps, shampoos and toothpastes that are biodegradable)
- Sunblock (don't skimp on sunblock, and use the biodegradable type)
- Insect repellent
- Water bottles
- First-aid kit
- Prescription medicines (many are available cheaper in Costa Rica, but don't take your chances)

What travel arrangements do I need to make?

For this workshop, we will be meeting and traveling as a group once participants arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica. You will need to make your own arrangements to fly into the Juan Santamaría International Airport in Alajuela (the primary international airport in Costa Rica), approximately 17 kilometers west of San José. More details on travel and rendezvous arrangements will be provided upon official enrollment in the course.

What is the agenda for the class?

The general travel itinerary and agenda for the May, 2010 trip is as follows:

- Day 1: Flights to San Jose, Costa Rica (arrive late-afternoon)
- Day 2: Charter Bus to Durika (depart in early am, arrive mid-afternoon)
Introduction to Durika – Culture, Climate, Safety, Policy Review
Course overview, goals and objectives, review of class agenda
- Day 3: Meet with local residents and discuss community energy needs
Survey of existing energy infrastructure
- Day 3: Solar Oven Construction
Tours and maintenance inspections of local renewable energy installations
(anaerobic digesters, solar electric, solar hot water, microhydro, wind, etc.)
- Day 4: Solar Oven Construction – continued
Site Assessment for renewable energy systems installation
Evening installation planning session (anaerobic digester, wind, or microhydro)
- Day 5: Tour day to visit local ecological sites
(National Park, Mtn Rainforest, Waterfall, Continental Divide)
- Day 6: Renewable energy system installation – methane biogas digester
- Day 7: Renewable energy system installation - continued
- Day 8: Renewable energy system installation – solar electric system
- Day 9: Debriefing on work accomplished
Solar Cooking Contest
Evening dinner and social gathering with residents and hosts
Organization for early morning departure
- Day 10: Charter Bus from Durika to San Jose (depart early-morning)
Return flights to the U.S. (depart afternoon)

Are Financial Aid funds available?

Possibly. This depends on your individual financial status. In many cases, additional financial aid awards can be made to support study abroad courses. Numerous local organizations also have scholarships available to support study abroad. Contact MATC's international study office and your financial aid officer to make further inquiries.

Are GI Bill funds available?

Possibly. This depends on your individual financial status and program of study. In many cases, additional financial aid awards can be made to support study abroad courses. Contact MATC's international study office and your VA officer to make further inquiries.

How do I enroll in the class?

A limited number of spaces are available in the class. So you are encouraged to register early. To register for the class, please contact:

MATC International Study Office**Phone: (608) 243-4461****Email: StudyAbroad@MATCmadison.edu****For Further Information about the course please contact:**

Kenneth A. Walz, Ph.D.
Renewable Energy Project Director
Madison Area Technical College
3550 Anderson St.
Madison, WI 53704
608-246-6521
kwalz@matcmadison.edu