

Intentional and Sustainable Living in Costa Rica

UTSA Honors College

Program Handbook 2025

The UTSA Honors College *Intentional and Sustainable Living in Costa Rica 2025* is offered by UTSA's Honors College and Office of International Programs. Our 10-day program gives students the opportunity to learn and practice intentional and sustainable living on an organic, off the grid ranch, yoga retreat, and intentional community on Lake Arenal, Costa Rica. Rancho Margot Eco Lodge programming in sustainable living, yoga, and service learning will serve as the backbone of the experience. Student learning goals are to 1) understand different ideas and approaches to sustainability and wellbeing, 2) experience daily life on a sustainable, organic and off the grid community in a foreign country and culture, and 3) connect their experiences with their personal values and visions for an intentional and engaged life.



Rancho Margot Eco Lodge, Lake Arenal, Costa Rica



Contact Information

Instructor

Eliot Howard

UTSA Honors College

eliot.howard@utsa.edu

(210) 305-1314 (my cell number - for emergencies only)

Emergency Contact Information Eliot Howard: 001 210-305-1314

In case of an emergency during the program, Eliot can be reached via his personal cell phone or through What's App. This number should be used in emergencies only by students, unless otherwise indicated by program directors. Please do not pass on the instructors' personal phone numbers to family members or friends.

On Call International (OCI) 24/7 Global Response Center at 001 978-651-9722.

If Eliot is not reachable in the event of an emergency, students should call OCI. They provide health, safety, and crisis management services to all UT System international travelers on a 24/7 basis.

In case of an emergency, family members can call UTSA Education Abroad Services at 210-458-7204 during working hours, Monday-Friday. After-hours or on weekends, call the UTSA Police Department at 210-458-4242, and they will relay the message to Education Abroad personnel.

Address in Costa Rica (for Study Abroad application and OCI Registration)

Rancho Margot (<http://www.ranchoMargot.com/>)
El Castillo de Peñas Blancas de San Ramón, Alajuela
Céd. Jurídica: 3-101-402095
Tél: (506) 8302-7318 Fax: (506) 2233-0334

Embassy Registration

All program participants who are U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to register with the U.S. Embassy before departure as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country's embassy or consulate.

U.S. Embassy San Jose
Calle 98 Vía 104, Pavas
San José, Costa Rica
Phone: (506) 2519-2000
Fax: (506) 2519-2305
<https://cr.usembassy.gov/>

Dates of Costa Rica Travel: June 12-21, 2025

* See "Travel and Arrival Information" for details on arrival/departure time.

Program Activities

During our time at Rancho Margot, we will be busy! Each day will involve specific program activities on the ranch. You can anticipate days filled with good food, yoga, reflection, work on the ranch and in the Ecolodge itself, and, often, a short social or academic evening event. One night, we'll have a night hike around the property with one of our eco-guides.

Your grade for this course is based on your full, willing and positive participation in all planned activities before and during the trip, in and around the Ecolodge with classmates, tourists, and ranch personnel, and your participation in reflection discussions about intentional and sustainable living models and experiences. Monthly post-trip class activities are also an important part of the learning experience and of your grade.

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Sample Daily Schedule: (subject to change – per Rancho Margot)

Day 1

5:00 PM Arrival at Rancho Margot
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 2

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Ranch Tour (Group A)/ Intro to Agroecology (Grp B)
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Ranch Tour (B)/ Intro to Agroecology (A)
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 3

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM The Person Behind the Entrepreneur
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM The Perks of Self-Sufficiency
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 4

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Gardening (A)/ Lab time: Dairy Prod. (B)
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Fertilizers Production Workshop
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 5

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Gardening (B)/ Lab time: Dairy Products (A)
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Conversation: Energy Production
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 6

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Garden (A)/ Lab: Soap & Repellent Prod. (B)
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Garden (B)/ Lab: Soap & Repellent Prod. (A)
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 7

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Community service in El Castillo town.
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Community service in El Castillo town.
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 8

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Morning trek - Rio Cano Negro sounds just perfect.
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Current design challenges - with Don Juan Sostheim
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 9

7:00 AM Yoga & Meditation 1hr/ Breakfast 7-9AM
9:30 AM Kayaking Arenal (A)/ Unstructured time (B)
12:00 PM Lunch
1:30 PM Kayaking Arenal (B)/ Unstructured time (A)
4:00 PM Yoga & Meditation
6:00 PM Dinner
8:00 PM Free Time

Day 10

6:30 AM Check out, quick breakfast, board shuttle
12:00 PM Arrive airport 2 hrs prior to 2:00 PM return flight

Preparation before Leaving San Antonio

Immigration Documents

U.S. citizens will need a valid passport to travel to Costa Rica. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website (<http://travel.state.gov/passport>). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad. Please send a picture of the number/picture page of your passport to Eliot or coinstructor. Non-U.S. citizens should contact their origin country's embassy to determine entry requirements in Costa Rica.

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You do not need your driver's license for Costa Rica.

Health Information

Consult with your health care professional(s) about your trip to Costa Rica, as well as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/travel. You can also contact On Call International, the student health insurance provider; you will get this information when you take the required risk management training with UTSA's Office of International Programs. While in Costa Rica, you will also be covered by the UTSA required On Call International insurance. Bring any required medications in their original containers; consider bringing additional Ziplock bags to put the medical containers in to reduce moisture retention in the medications.

Handling Money Abroad

Credit cards are accepted at Rancho Margot as well as in virtually all shops and restaurants we may visit; however, bringing a small sum of cash with you can be handy. The Costa Rican *colón* is commonly exchanged at approximately \$500 per US dollar. Always make sure that you understand whether a price is in colones or US dollars. Most hotels, restaurants, and tour operators will accept credit cards and many will also accept U.S. currency. Be sure to inquire with waitstaff when you receive your bill if tip has already been added to your costs, as there are sometimes different policies on gratuity in foreign countries.

Traveler's checks are not recommended because they can be hard to cash. It is recommended that you contact your credit card provider and bank and inform them that you will be travelling to Costa Rica so they will not doubt the validity of the charges. With credit card providers, be sure to ask whether they charge foreign transaction fees. Consult with your bank to see if they have any agreements with Costa Rican banks to waive the cash withdrawal fees. These will vary by bank.

Phones

You will not need cellular phone service at Rancho Margot for our course purposes. Part of this experience is to get away from social media, so please make an effort to electronically disconnect as much as possible in order to bring back your social awareness, sans electronics, in alignment with the course goal of living intentionally and simply.

If you choose to bring a phone for taking pictures and for communication during free time, we recommend leaving it for the most part in a Ziplock bag in your locked cabinet until free time. Rancho Margot has wireless internet for guests in the reception area so you can use your phone for wifi-based contact with friends and family members in the U.S.

Keeping your phone on airplane mode and turning off roaming/cellular data are two ways to drastically reduce costs associated with using your phone in Costa Rica. Please check with your mobile phone provider about the costs associated with using your phone internationally. You may purchase an international calling/data plan at your discretion; however, we do not suggest this except as an emergency precaution. There is limited cellular reception throughout the ranch. Also because of the course expectation that phone use is limited to just during free times (when you'll have internet access), an international calling/data plan may be largely unnecessary.

Individuals opting to bring a phone are required to install the **OCI Plan ID** and WhatsApp.



All students will have the OCI Plan G210430 with contact information pre-loaded on their mobile devices and in printed form with their travel documents. [Click Plan ID](#) from your mobile

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device and follow a single prompt to save to the home screen of your phone. This is not an app and does not require any login or personal details. Opening the Plan ID from your mobile device will allow you to click-to-dial On Call, open a 24/7 Live Chat link and access other plan documents such as the full plan description and tele-counseling information.



WhatsApp is a cross-platform mobile app that allows you to make voice calls and exchange text messages via the internet without having to pay for cellular/SMS service. This is an essential way to communicate with each other while abroad and with your program directors. We will exchange numbers during our pre-departure program session. *This app will be our primary way of staying in touch when we are not together as a group.*

An additional note about cell phone security: many free wifi networks are not encrypted, which means your phone can be hacked. Do *not* store passwords or other private information on your phone if you want to maximize your privacy.

What to bring to Costa Rica

Identification

- Passport
- You will want to put these in your locked bunkhouse cabinet or drawer and leave them there. You will not need your passport during the trip at any time other than our departure and return travel days. As previously requested, take a picture of your passport; send it to Eliot or co-instructor as well as to a family member or friend in the U.S.

Pack as lightly as possible!

- *You only have a small cabinet and one deep drawer for all of your things.*
- *Pack lightly for a week – clothes left in a dark drawer for a week in the rainforest can grow mold.*
- *We are minimizing waste and our use of commercial products. Keep this question in mind for each item you want to take: do I really need this? Ask us if you have any doubts.*
- *Do not bring commercial food or drink, unless you have a dietary restriction and have spoken with Eliot or coinstructor.*

Clothing and Related Items

There are four variables to think about for clothing for our program: 1) activity, 2) weather, 3) storage space, and 4) cultural location. In general, we will be outside, and active. It will often be humid and buggy. You will have one small cabinet and deep drawer to keep your things. The cultural location is important. Costa Rica is sporty casual for ecotourists; avoid revealing clothing (men or women). At all times, you are a UTSA and United States ambassador. It is always better to err on the side of less-revealing attire. *Please, no short-shorts, visible undergarments, suggestive, offensive or ragged clothes.*

- 2-3 pairs loose, lightweight pants that are quick dry and thin. (Cotton and denim will not easily dry and will likely mold. Consider synthetic fabric pants that might be used for hiking, outdoor sports, etc.)
- 1-2 pair shorts (opt for long pants if you know you attract mosquitos).
- 4-5 lightweight shirts that are quick dry and thin. Of this total number of shirts, consider 2-3 long sleeved for bug and skin protection.
- Lightweight sleepwear

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- 1 set yoga clothes: shirt and pants in which you can bend and twist comfortably (what you would need if you were going to play Twister for an hour). Leggings are fine for yoga, but you don't want them for your work around the ranch. Leggings will be hotter than loose pants.
- Light weight rain jacket and pants, or poncho and/or umbrella
- Footwear
 - Water shoes for shower, walking to/from pool, kayaking
 - Sturdy, closed toed, good tread walking or hiking shoes for walking around Rancho Margot, kicking a soccer ball and hiking (steep!) jungle trails.
 - (Rubber boots for farm work – we will buy these as a group in CR, \$15)
 - 5-6 pair quick dry or wicking socks. Consider wool or synthetic fabric socks.
 - We recommend you bring your own comfort/orthopedic inserts for the rubber boots
- Gardening gloves
- Enough underwear for a week
- Swimsuit and cover-up
- A brimmed hat

Additional Items

- Accessible emergency funds \$500 (by credit or debit card) -this is "just in case" money for any upfront health related payments, prior to reimbursement by On Call International, per their coverage guide.
- Compact headlamp. Shouldn't be expensive but look for one that has red and white light options.
- A small journal or notebook
- Waist pack or very light/compact daypack
- Reusable water bottle
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent, preferably non-DEET
- Anti-itch crème; Benadryl (generic: diphenhydramine)
- antibiotic ointment, Band-aids
- Consider motion sickness medicine, pepto, antacid,
- Any prescription medications in original containers. Please make sure you have enough for the entire trip. The closest pharmacy is a 45 minute trip by taxi.
- Personal hygiene items, limited to what you really need, fragrance-free encouraged
- Earplugs for sleeping (if your roommate snores!) and an eye mask if you are sensitive to light.
- Ziplock bags or dry sacks to keep your electronics dry.
- Charging cord for phone, if you are bringing one. The electricity in Costa Rica is just like the U.S. There is no need for adapters. Each bunkhouse room has one outlet.
- Small set of headphones if you want to listen to music on your mobile device at night without disturbing your roommate in the other half of the room.
- Wooden clothesline clips – we are not planning to use the laundry service, but you may have items that just need to dry. There is a drying enclosure behind the bunkhouse, and 8-10 clothespins will be helpful.
- Travel binoculars – these aren't necessary but you'll be glad you have them on hikes and walking around the ranch. We can also share the ones we do bring, if cost is an issue.

What to leave at home

- Valuable or unnecessary jewelry
- Irreplaceable family objects
- All unnecessary credit cards
- Any powdered item in an unmarked plastic bag

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- Any item that is not essential to the purpose of the course and the activities at Rancho Margot
- Photocopies of your passport, the travel itinerary, and lodging information with family or friends
- Note: Any fruits or vegetables brought on the plane must be consumed or thrown away before arriving in Costa Rica in order to minimize any contamination from pests.

Travel and Arrival Information

We will fly to Costa Rica on United Airlines; we will update this handbook with flight times once tickets are purchased. When we arrive in San Jose, we will drive three hours to Rancho Margot in a private bus.

We have budgeted to cover the cost of one checked bag, which should be more than adequate to carry all of the items on the packing list. If you find that you need to check an additional bag or your luggage is oversized, the additional cost is your responsibility. See the United Airlines checked baggage policies for full details. Storage space at the ranch is limited. You are strongly urged to bring only one suitcase.

PRE-TRIP RENDEZVOUS

June 11, 2025 4:00 pm

Location in San Antonio, TBD

DEPARTURE [flights are subject to change, specific times & flight #s still TBD]

Outbound June 12, 2025

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM, San Antonio SAT to Houston Hobby HOU

10:40 AM - 1:10 PM, HOU to Guanacaste (LIR), Costa Rica

RETURN

Return June 21, 2025

2:02 PM - 6:35 PM, LIR to HOU

9:10 PM - 10:55 PM, HOU to SAT

***** ARRIVE AT THE AIRPORT NO LATER THAN 5:30 AM.**

GROUP UP NEAR THE SOUTHWEST AIRLINE TICKET COUNTER ***

Expectations of Student Conduct

You will be participating in an experiential learning course in a foreign country. We have explicit rules and expectations of student conduct to maximize student learning and student safety, improve the quality of the international experience for everyone, and preserve the reputation of UTSA in Costa Rica. Again, at all times, you are an UTSA ambassador; people will remember your university and your behavior. Behavioral expectations are posted at the end of this handbook; violations are taken very seriously, and these can result in being sent home from the program and failing the class. We also have some general advice in this section.

Unfortunately, Americans have developed a worldwide reputation of being loud, rude, and inappropriately dressed tourists who tend to overdrink. One of our goals is to change the image to a respectful, culturally sensitive visitor. Moreover, courtesy is culturally valued in Costa Rica. Some basic rules of etiquette will go a long way in demonstrating respect and professionalism. These include:

- Use titles for *anyone* new, older, or more trained in a given area than you are.
- Verbally greet someone when you enter a room and use eye contact.

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- Say “please” when requesting anything and “thank you” or “no, thank you” when answering an offer or request. Say “excuse me” if you need to move past someone and “excuse me” when you approach a stranger to ask something, such as directions.
- Respect the volume of your surroundings: do not speak too loudly.
- Know your limits! If you over the drinking age, do not drink alcohol to the point it affects your behavior. If you under the drinking age, you may not drink.

A few pieces of Costa Rica-specific advice include:

- Try to speak Spanish – use *Usted*, not *tú*, unless you are speaking to children or really good friends.
- **Be on time.** In fact, be several minutes early and prepared to start on time. Particularly in academic and business settings, punctuality is a sign of professionalism and respect.

Social Media Etiquette

- Pictures or comments on social media should be carefully chosen to reflect well on UTSA Honors
- No posting pictures of individuals (especially children) without permission.
- No pictures or comments on social media about anything that happens ‘behind the scenes’ at Rancho Margot. Ranch staff live there and it is important to respect their privacy.
- Follow all local rules about pictures. Ask before taking one; do not assume it is permissible.
- If a crisis for any of our students occurs, we go on “social media lockdown,” meaning no information whatsoever goes out on social media until cleared. We do not want incomplete information getting to family and friends. There is a specific protocol to make sure family stays fully up to date; UTSA Office of International Programs is responsible for these actions.
- Checking in with family and friends through social media if there is an emergency, such as a natural disaster, is expected and encouraged.
- We encourage you to share your experience and to post with a level of caring judgment, cultural sensitivity, and respect for yourself, your peers, UTSA, and our hosts in Costa Rica.

Technology Use

- In addition to the above, phones may not be used during program activities *except* for pictures and your flashlight function, if absolutely necessary. (You want your hands free walking in a wet, slippery environment, and you want to use a red light headlamp to reduce bugs, light pollution and eye adjustment at night.) Non-program related tech use is permissible during down time.

Leaving Rancho Margot on your own IS NOT ALLOWED, no exceptions.

If you want to go exploring Rancho Margot during free time, here are the requirements:

- your trip must be pre-approved by Eliot or co-instructor with a route and destination in mind,
- you must have a working cell phone (which means an international phone plan),
- you must have a buddy who stays with you at *all* times,
- you must have a required return time, and physically check in together with instructor upon return

House Rules. It should go without saying that we will all follow Rancho Margot rules on behavior, quiet times, and related.

You are required to use the buddy system at all times, even on the Ecolodge grounds.
The terrain can be rough and slippery, and we need to be able to find you if you slip.

We take your safety very seriously. Any violation of the above will result in the sanctions outlined in the Conditions of Participation at the end of this document.

Housing and Meals

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Students will share a very compact bedroom with two bunk beds. While these rooms are single gender, the bunkhouse is not. There are individual shower and restroom stalls, but they are located in a shared space. Instructors may rotate roommate assignments one or more times mid-course to promote greater group interactivity.

Meals are served buffet style for all Ecolodge guests; we eat family style with other guests. Polite conversation is encouraged with everyone at the tables, not just within our group. There are vegetarian and gluten-free options at every meal. Water, coffee, and tea with herbs grown in the Medicinal Garden are available at all times. The water is potable at the Ecolodge, even in the sinks. There is not commercial food for sale at the Ecolodge; there are some commercial drinks available at the bar.

Transportation

We will use a private transportation company for our excursions to the kayaking and service project excursions. This is the company the Ecolodge recommends, and it is the same company that will provide our airport transportation.

Technology Use Policy

During program activities, phones can *only* be used for taking pictures. All personal communication, including social media, can occur during down times, including transportation to and from the airport and free time during our daily schedules. This does not include mealtime; meals are eaten communally as part of our program.

Drinking Alcohol

In Costa Rica

Although the legal drinking age in Costa Rica is 18, the expectation for UTSA Study Abroad participants is that you adhere to the laws of our home institution and therefore **refrain from drinking unless you are at least 21**. Should you choose to drink alcohol, regulate your intake to avoid inebriation (see contract for rules of behavior at the end of this handbook). Make sure you have consumed enough water and food if you choose to drink alcohol since tropical, humid conditions may negatively impact your body's response to alcohol.

At all times, we expect a group culture that supports and maintains sober moderation, assertively confronts excessive consumption and generally maintains professional behavior regarding alcohol use. Unprofessional or illegal behavior can result in immediate expulsion from the program. Should any student drink to the point of inebriation, exhibit behaviors that negatively affect the group, or interfere with any Ecolodge or UTSA activities, they may be asked to leave the program. In this case, the student will pay for their immediate return trip home (in excess of \$1,000). Faculty have the right to modify the alcohol policy for the group if alcohol consumption interferes with any aspect of the program.

Risk Management

The chief concerns indicated in the US State Department travel advisory included petty criminal victimization. Our chief precautions to mitigate risks of crime will be 1) **remaining together** as an intact group, 2) transporting during daylight hours via chartered bus service for all travel and activity occurring away from the Rancho Margot campus, 3) practicing vigilant situational awareness for any indication of possible trouble, and 4) keeping in contact via whatsapp with instructors and On Call International. Additionally, while on RM property, students will travel and participate in pairs or larger groups. In the event of an emergency or any time assistance is required, go directly to the Rancho Margot reception office.

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Faculty will have international cell phone coverage to maintain communications with our designated UTSA Contact, Rancho Margot, On Call International (OCI), and the US Embassy as needed.

All students will have the OCI Plan ID with contact information pre-loaded on their mobile devices and in printed form with their travel documents. Prior to arrival and departure travel, faculty will contact OCI for most current conditions and communicate advisory updates with students and UTSA Contact.

Health

It is a good idea to bring a personal supply of aspirin, allergy medicine, Band-aids, antibiotic cream, etc. If you are allergic to insect bites/stings, foods, or plants, you should ask your doctor about an 'epi-pen' and supplemental antihistamine medication in case of an allergic reaction. If you wear glasses or contacts, it is wise to bring a spare pair. If you get airsick or car sick, it's a good idea to bring motion sickness medicine.

Should you have any concerns about the trip, UTSA Counseling Services can work with you to develop a personalized travel plan to address any worries you may have about traveling.

In Costa Rica

We recommend contacting On Call International at 978-651-9722 for a health briefing (at no charge). OCI can provide you with information about vaccinations and health precautions. Your traveler's medical insurance should cover any health emergencies in Costa Rica, but you should bring a full supply of any over-the-counter medications and any prescription medications and supplements that you need. Consider an anti-diarrheal and motion sickness tablets, just in case. Your prescription medications and supplements should be in their original pharmacy containers, bearing the pharmacy label with your name (not anyone else's name).

Religious Services

If you would like to attend religious services of any faith, please let us know in advance so we can help you locate the proper location and safe transportation. We cannot guarantee any or all religious services will be available, given our distance from any major city. But, we will explore every request to find what is available, where, and transportation costs to and from the location.

Weather

The daytime weather will vary mostly between 70F and 85F. The nighttime temperatures will hover around 55F-70F. Relative humidity will be 80-90%. June is the beginning of the rainy season. Expect rain in the afternoon and evenings (and it is such a lovely sound to hear the rain coming down in the forest outside your window!).

Problems?

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions, from health to roommates to cultural expectations, be sure to talk to Eliot ASAP. We are here to help you and ensure a positive learning experience. We are experienced travelers and teachers, and we have additional resources that can help you navigate your time abroad. We will have daily check-ins and be together for every meal, at minimum, but be sure to contact us if you need something.

In the Event of an Emergency

In the event of an emergency and provided you can use your phone, please follow these steps:

1. Get to the safest place possible - At Rancho Margot, this will be the reception/dining or the soccer field.

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2. Contact On Call International. They will engage all resources at their disposal to help you and coordinate a response.
3. Call local 911 EMS as the situation requires
4. Contact Eliot. Follow all directions.
5. If instructors are unavailable, contact the Education Abroad office. Follow all directions.
6. Contact your family.

In the event of an emergency, such as a natural disaster, and circuits are down, please head to our nearest emergency meeting place: the Rancho Margot reception office.

Please take a picture or make another kind of copy of this plan to keep with you at all times.

Websites of Interest

Rancho Margot: <http://www.rancomargot.com/>

UTSA's Education Abroad Services Office: <http://studyabroad.utsa.edu/>

On Call International:

[https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/risk-management/call-international#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20abroad%20and,%2D9722%20\(UT's%20dedicated%20Line\)](https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/risk-management/call-international#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20abroad%20and,%2D9722%20(UT's%20dedicated%20Line))

U.S. State Department Costa Rica page: <https://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/cs/>

American Embassy in Costa Rica: <https://cr.usembassy.gov/>

CDC page on Costa Rica: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/costa-rica>

Lonely Planet pages on Arenal area and Costa Rica generally, starting with:

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/costa-rica/northwestern-costa-rica/arenal-route>

Your grade

Your grade will be earned through the following:

- Pre-trip orientations, readings, and activities: 30%
- Participation in Costa Rica (June 12-21): 50%
- Participation in four community immersion activities, including written reflections (2-3 pages each): 20%

GRADING RUBRIC for PARTICIPATION

CATEGORIES	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS 21-25	MEETS EXPECTATIONS 13-20	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 6-12	FAILS TO MEET EXPECTATIONS 0-5	YOUR SCORE/ 20 total
Full, willing, and positive participation	Attended all activities for entire duration (or excused); prepared & on time/early; actively participated w/o instructor prompting; took initiative to interact and set good example for others to follow	Attended all activities for entire duration (or excused), mostly prepared & on time/early; actively participated w/ occasional prompts from instructor to interact; followed others' lead	Attended all activities for entire length of time (unless excused); inconsistently prepared and/or late; required repeated instructor prompts to interact;	Regularly late and/or unprepared. Demonstrated little to no initiative to interact even after instructor repeatedly mentioned it.	
Following instructions of faculty and designated leaders	Consistently followed instructions in an exemplary way	Mostly followed instructions, improved after minor infraction was addressed	Mostly followed instructions, but required repeated correction	Consistent disregard for instructions	

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Collegial, respectful, and considerate	Contributed conspicuously to enhancing a positive learning environment, supported others' learning, welcomed others' ideas and questions; lead formation of positive group norms	Responsive to cues to participate in positive learning environment; treated others with respect and followed basic ground rules.	Inconsistent in professional & respectful communication; occasionally violated ground rules.	Undermines positive learning environment, disrespecting others, being an obstacle to others' learning and contributions; inappropriate language and behavior	
Exploration of thematic & academic content	Made substantive reference to texts (assigned and/or other). Contributed critical and creative thinking to class discussions; explored connections with personal life experiences, beliefs, and broader questions	Thoughtful and engaged directly with topics of discussion, but without substantive reference to readings	Isolated contributions, lacking evident deep thought or completion of the reading assignments or requiring instructor prompts to engage	Incomplete Demonstrated little to no initiative to examine thematic content, even after instructor repeatedly mentioned it.	

GRADING RUBRIC for REFLECTION PAPERS

CRITERIA	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS 18-20	MEETS EXPECTATIONS 13-17	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 6-12	FAILS TO MEET EXPECTATIONS 0-5	YOUR SCORE/ 20 total
Clearly organized introduction, body, conclusion	Easy to read, topic introduced, organization clearly evident with proper introduction, body, conclusion	Paper has intro, body, and conclusion but some sections may take a re-reading to understand	Somewhat disorganized, and lacking clarity of meaning	Fails to meet these criteria; confusing and disorganized	
Effectively addressing the prompt or the topic	The student's reflection about the topic is explained in clear language; immediately interesting and supported with detail	All content relates to the prompt or topic; the student explains his/her reflections about the topic but may take a rereading to understand	Student does not clearly identify his/her reflections about the topic; may veer from topic	The topic of the paper is not addressed at all	
Strong paragraph organization and Writing Style: Ideas are clearly connected and make sense	Each paragraph has a central idea; ideas are connected and paragraphs are developed with details; paper is easy to read with organized "flow"	Each paragraph has a central idea that is supported with details; ideas are connected and important points make sense	Disorganized; ideas are included which do not relate to the main idea; ideas are not connected and have little or no supporting details; one sentence paragraphs	Fails to meet this criteria by obvious disregard for the expectations stated in the criteria	
Evidence of deep thought about the topic	Paper provides evidence (description, details, and use of readings) that the student has examined his/her own belief systems in relation to the topic	The paper shows that the student has thought about the topic although the written presentation may lack clarity; references readings to support concepts	Paper is shallow and does not present detailed evaluation of reflection about the topic	Fails to meet this criteria by obvious disregard for the expectations stated in the criteria	
Basic writing expectations (BWE): spelling, grammar, punctuation and formatting	No errors whatsoever!	Between 1-4 BWE errors, but they are minor and do not detract from the paper	4-7 BWE errors	More than 8 BWE errors	

Community Immersion Experiences

The week after our return from Costa Rica, we will reconvene in-person to explore how the themes and practices of sustainability and intentional living are present in the San Antonio community. The activities for these sessions are under development, but for a sense of what we have done, see these examples below:

- Yoga in the Park (sign up here: <https://mobileomtx.com/#live-classes>)
- Leave No Trace Environmental Ethics
- Street Skills Cycling Safety with AAMPO
- Community Gardening

After each session, participants will be asked to submit a reflection paper that critically examines their experience in connection to the class themes, identifies what they learned in terms of knowledge, skills and/or attitudes, and states how they foresee applying that learning as a scholar and a human earthling. One of the reflection papers can be substituted with a poster suitable for inclusion in the San Antonio Sustainability Showcase and/or the UTSA Honors Experiential Learning Fair.

Conditions of Participation for The University of Texas at San Antonio's Program: Intentional and Sustainable Living in Costa Rica

Participant: _____

Program name: Intentional and Sustainable Living in Costa Rica **Semester:** Summer 2025

You have chosen to take advantage of one of the study-abroad program opportunities provided by the Honors College. This is an educational endeavor, with a series of curricular goals that you will need to achieve.

This program **is not a vacation**. The program will have a very busy schedule, and the opportunities to visit tourist attractions and take free time will be limited. You will be engaged in experiential learning in intentional and sustainable living at Rancho Margot, an Ecodge, sustainable and organic farm and ranch, and a yoga retreat center. There is required, additional coursework at UTSA before leaving. It is expected that you will actively and fully participate in all official program activities. It is also expected that you will follow the instructions and directions of program directors and project staff.

To maximize your value added for this experience, it is necessary that you behave respectfully and maturely and that you are collegial, respectful, and considerate to others for the entirety of the program. Any activity that interferes with the educational endeavor—your learning or the learning of other students—will not be tolerated. Similarly, any activity that potentially damages the relationship between UTSA and the program directors, the Government of Costa Rica, Rancho Margot, and/or our local host communities **will not be tolerated** and will be considered a sanctionable violation that may result in disciplinary action.

You should understand that failure to comply with the conditions listed in this document may have a negative impact on your course grade and could result in your being dismissed from the program and returned home *at your expense*. Examples of non-tolerated behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Academic dishonesty
- Obstruction or disruption of teaching or other program activities
- Unauthorized absence from program activities
- Travel without at least one other student and without explicit approval from either Eliot or co-instructor.
- Failure to attend daily morning check-in's and evening reflection/confluence discussions
- The use of, or threats of, physical violence
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual misconduct
- Violating the laws of Texas or Costa Rica
- Openly abusing the customs and mores of the community
- Damage to, or destruction of, property of others, university (including lodging), zoo, service learning sites, or cultural sites that we visit
- Abuse or misuse of alcohol or prescription drugs. You are misusing alcohol or prescription drugs if their use leads you to do any of the following:
 - Are underage (alcohol) or not the intended patient of prescription medication
 - Be unable to conduct coursework or miss a scheduled field trip, lecture, or other program event
 - Become ill
 - Be disrespectful of others, engage in inappropriate behaviors, disturb others, or disrupt program events
 - Engage in destructive behavior toward property or people
 - Engage in behavior that causes embarrassment to the other members of the group, the faculty member(s), or the in-country host(s)

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- Engage in risky activities or make decisions that endanger yourself or others
- Bringing alcohol to program sites to consume, distribute, or share with members of the group
- Using illegal substances, including marijuana
- Disturbing others at night (we will follow the quiet hours of Rancho Margot)
- Driving a personal vehicle, whether your own or that of somebody else
- Bringing unauthorized guests to program facilities, including lodging and clinic/hospital, or activities
 - Students' family members and friends are not allowed, by UTSA policy, on any program related travel, event or activity.
- Smoking is permitted only in designated areas
- Being absent for any scheduled pick-up or departure, except in cases of emergencies or by prior arrangement
- Violating the UTSA Code of Student Conduct in other ways while on the program
- Engaging in any other activity that the program directors consider to be a detriment to the overall purpose of the program

Your study abroad directors have the authority to take actions that they deem appropriate to address issues or incidents that arise during the program. Any student or staff member caught using illegal drugs will be dismissed from the program immediately and sent home. Breaking other rules will result in a verbal warning for the first offence. Repeated offences will bring other sanctions, up to and including being dismissed from the program. Such possible actions may include, but not be limited to: verbal warnings, written warnings, alterations of the individual's involvement in course activities and expectations, dismissal from the program, etc. Such action by your program directors does not prevent or in any way preclude UTSA Student Conduct and Community Standards from also taking appropriate action upon your return to UTSA.

It should also be understood that a student dismissed from the program will not receive a refund for program fees or trip costs; the student will receive a grade of F for all courses in the program; there will be no refund for tuition, fees, and other costs associated with enrollment; and the student shall bear the additional costs of immediate transport home. It should also be understood that the program directors and staff will be unable to assist any student, whose actions violate or allegedly violate any local laws, regulations, etc., including any actions that lead to incarceration, or other criminal or civil penalties, nor is it their responsibility to do so.

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read, understand and agree to the above paragraphs.

Signature [by Parent/Guardian if the Student is under 18 years of age]

Date

Printed Name [by Parent/Guardian if the Student is under 18 years of age]