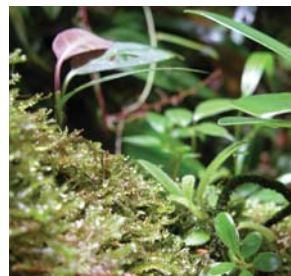




Español en la Naturaleza

Kate Sommers-Dawes finds Spanish natural in Costa Rica



Tourists the world over flock to this Central American utopia, nearly a third of which is protected territory and consequently pristine. Similar in size to the state of West Virginia but brimming with biodiversity (over 1,200 species of butterflies flit about its shores), Costa Rica's rainforests, hot springs, and beaches have long attracted eco-tourists and adventurers alike. The nation, bordered by Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south, is also a model for environmental stewardship. It is managed by the only government whose environmental minister sets energy policy, creating synchronization between two sectors that find themselves regularly at odds in other republics. "It [has] created a very different way of thinking about how to solve problems," said Carlos M. Rodríguez, who served in that position in the early 2000s, and led the way in offering financial incentives to those who work to conserve the land's ecosystems.

The result is something of a tropical paradise whose government searches for sustainable, long-term solutions to development. Costa Rica's locals (who call themselves *Ticos*) cherish their country's rugged terrain, distinctive plant and animal life, active volcanoes, and lush rainforests while enjoying a mild climate whose regular thunderstorms coax plantlife from every corner. The tranquil yet passionate *Tico* lifestyle is summarized by their commonly uttered maxim of "*Pura Vida*," which describes an existence distilled to its purest essence.

There is an extensive, if somewhat leisurely and sometimes indirect, bus system readily accessible for adventurers who wish to crisscross the country on the cheap and don't mind potential delays. There are also two international airports and more expensive shuttle companies

for travelers with less time or patience. Spanish language students headed to Costa Rica will find generous inhabitants, Spanish that is easily deciphered, unique adventures and plenty of opportunities to serve through volunteering programs, both ecological and humanitarian.

Volunteering with **United Planet** is an effective way to quickly acquire Spanish conversation skills, learning on the go while creating trails in the cloud forest, teaching English in Monteverde, or patrolling protected sea turtle beaches. United Planet offers a wide range of different volunteer experiences in Costa Rica. All of United Planet's programs offer the chance to be fully immersed in the *Tico* daily life, for which Costa Rica is famous. Volunteer stints are available from one to 12 weeks, and include accommodation with host families or in dorm-style cabins. Participants receive a formal three to four day orientation in San José, including a visit to the Manuel Antonio National Park and the Metropolitan Opera. Costa Rica is an eco-tourism hotspot, well-known for its amazing natural beauty and biodiversity. Through eco-tourism, Costa Rica has been able to prosper while protecting the country's vast natural resources and ensuring its economic future. United Planet volunteers work at eco-lodges, endangered sea turtle beaches, and wildlife rehabilitation centers at various locations to help raise the local standard of living and quality of life while protecting the environment. Various opportunities to volunteer in San José are also available. United Planet offers a wide range of experiences from assisting with cultural activities to teaching English to students and organizing activities for at-risk children.

With **Globe Aware**, students can begin their own adventure in serv-

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ice. It's "Costa Rica Road Less Traveled Rainforest Village Experience" program offers a unique way for volunteers to earn service hours while immersing themselves in the language and culture of Costa Rica. All volunteer projects are sustainable in nature and focus on both building infrastructure and preserving the natural environment. Planned cultural activities include, but are not limited to, learning how to make *trapique* with the village elders, traditional cheese making, and incredible nature hikes. Globe Aware also offers a new program on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, the "Caribbean Community Experience," in which volunteers can engage in recycling programs, school building and maintenance, and sea turtle conservation projects while also taking advantage of the distinct Caribbean culture that this area of Costa Rica provides. Take a boat ride through the canals to view wildlife, join in a coconut oil and fish salting demonstration, or simply learn the art of salsa and meringue. Global Aware offers one of the best ways to immerse oneself in another culture: volunteering to make a difference.

Efficient and flexible programs and a family atmosphere are the specialty of **Rey de Nosara Language School** in Guanacaste. The 17-year-old school offers a serene location in the middle of the Nosara-Ostional National Reserve, on the banks of the Nosara river. The area's beaches are famous for the *arribadas* (arrivals) of thousands of turtles laying their eggs in the dark sand. Nearby Guiones beach boasts a

near-perfect surf and, in addition to surfing, students enjoy horseback-riding, cycling, scuba-diving, swimming, hiking, fishing, bird watching, snorkeling, tennis, and dancing.

Personalized Spanish is a boutique Spanish school in a quiet neighborhood in Tres Ríos, San José, Costa Rica. Classes host a maximum of three students, allowing the flexibility to teach according to students' natural learning styles and create individualized curricula that reflect their needs. All teachers are certified to teach Spanish to second language learners. Levels range from beginner to advanced, including specialized programs for professionals in the fields of education, social work, business, law, and medicine. Personalized Spanish also offers internship opportunities. The school is located in a safe suburb of San José and homestay accommodations are with Costa Rican families. Personalized Spanish's environment is relaxed, but professional. The school considers the real measurement of its success to be the dozens of satisfied students who choose to return to the school for further study or improvement of their Spanish language skills.

Intercultural Student Experiences (ISE) is a nonprofit educational organization founded in 1972 that provides travel with family stay programs for language students and teachers of Spanish in Costa Rica. ISE's 9- and 14-day Guided Programs include visits to Arenal Volcano, Monteverde, Manuel Antonio National Park and a 6-night family stay. The itinerary combines ecotourism with language and cultural immersion, and the family stay option offers the opportunity for students and teachers to live in a rural setting.

In addition, ISE has immersion programs in China, Germany, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Quebec, Spain and Taiwan. Each year, ISE works with teachers, parents and student from more than thirty states. More than 90,000 teachers and students have experienced their international immersion programs. ISE staff members and our board of directors are committed to ensuring your experience is meaningful and life-changing. Financial aid is available to families earning less than \$50,000 year.

Amigos de las Americas (AMIGOS) is an international nonprofit organization that provides leadership and community service opportunities for teenagers and young adults in Latin America, including Costa Rica. Through AMIGOS, volunteers develop leadership and team-building skills, cultural understanding, and Spanish fluency.

For five to eight weeks during the summer, volunteers immerse themselves in the language and lives of their host communities. Partnerships of two or three volunteers live in host communities, where they work on youth leadership, health, education and environmental protection programs alongside community members and partner agencies.

A 2008 survey revealed that 95 percent of participants reported significant growth in their ability to converse in Spanish. This year, in Costa Rica, volunteers lived in 26 rural communities in the Perez Zeledón region, working with local youth on trash and sanitation issues, recycling, deforestation, and water pollution projects.

There are four aspects that make **Academia de Español d'Amore** stand out from other institutions: the personalized attention, the teaching methodology, its location, and most importantly, its 17 years of experience teaching Spanish as a second language. The academy is a small institution with a strong record of promoting and facilitating high quality Spanish language instruction. Academia de Español d'Amore



Avant Assessment has delivered over 200,000 STAMP tests in hundreds of districts, schools, and colleges in over 37 states. Over the last five years, educators have relied on STAMP to inform their instruction and build proficiency-based programs – to raise the bar and improve learning in their classroom. After all, isn't that what it's all about?

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works with small class groups (four-six maximum), fostering personalized and individual attention for students. The academy is also dedicated to the idea of learning in action; cooking, dancing, acting, singing, watching, playing, researching, and interacting with locals all figure into instruction, depending on the student's personalities and interests. In addition to academic excellence, the school's location is among the most beautiful in Costa Rica. Located on a hill, facing the Pacific Ocean (a few miles away from Manuel Antonio National Park, one of Costa Rica's natural highlights), the school's ocean and rainforest views are simply breathtaking. It is a perfect setting for learning Spanish while enjoying Costa Rican beauty.

Centro Panamericano de Idiomas (CPI) provides quality Spanish language instruction while offering students the opportunity to improve their Spanish skills at any one of (or all) three campuses located in distinct areas of Costa Rica: the town of Heredia, the Monteverde cloud forest, and Flamingo Beach. The CPI inter-campus option enables students of all ages and nationalities to maximize their linguistic experience by seeing more of one of the most beautiful countries in the Americas. Students can choose the length of stay (minimum one week/no maximum) with classes for all Spanish levels beginning each Monday. Recognized by the prestigious Cervantes Institute of Spain, each CPI

campus maintains high quality teaching methodology, faculty, and staff to ensure that students receive uniform excellence regardless of which location they choose and a seamless transition for those students dividing their time amongst the three locations. Class sizes at CPI average two to three students with a maximum of four students per class, permitting personalized instruction to meet individual needs. Additionally, CPI creates customized itineraries for university and high school groups as well as specialized programs tailored to professionals (medical, social work, business, biology, police, and firefighter programs). The CPI Admission's Office assists in organizing homestay accommodations or local lodging in hotels, private apartments or campus housing. Its administrative staff diligently work to create cultural opportunities to complement the program's linguistic study and also make travel arrangements for students interested in touring the country. CPI is thus a full service operation meeting all student needs. **IX** Visit our **NEW** interactive study abroad website: languagemagazine.com/study-abroad.

Kate Sommers-Dawes recently encountered sloths, iguanas and mango-hurling howler monkeys while exploring Costa Rica's verdant, diverse terrain and survived intact to provide our stunning photographs.

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