Ten issues to deal with **BEFORE** you leave

1. **Deal with MSU** - take care of any bills, holds, and paperwork with MSU. Make sure you have enrolled for the correct study abroad course sections and number of credits, as well as other spring term courses. Take care of your financial aid, scholarships, loans, or any financial holds.

2. **Bills** - leave money for friends or family who will take care of your rent and bills while you are gone. You might set up **automatic or on-line bill payment**, which you can monitor overseas. Be sure to let your utilities, creditors, and bank know that you will be gone by providing them with your travel location and dates. *It is especially important to tell the financial institution(s) providing your credit, debit, or ATM cards. If they are not notified, they may unknowingly put a block on your overseas credit charges as a safe guard to your financial security. If you have an MSU Credit Union account, you can use ComputerLine to enter “Travel Information.”*

3. **Mail / Newspaper** - forward or put a hold stop on your mail. You could have someone gather and hold your mail while you are gone. Visit www.usps.com to submit an electronic hold mail service for up to one month in duration. You can suspend some subscriptions while you are gone too (e.g., Netflix, newspapers, magazines, etc.).

4. **Dependants** - find proper homes for all your living friends - your children, pets, and plants. Have may want someone to take care of your car too (e.g., start it up, clean off snow or drive it around the block).

5. **Job/Job Hunt** - inform your employer and/or future employer(s) about your trip. Have you let your future or potential employers know you will be gone? Are you set to start work when you get back? Do you have someone collecting your last paycheck for you? Make sure you check the calendar. Don’t schedule a check-in or interview while we’re camping!

6. **Family** - give your friends and family information about your flight and itinerary information (give them the blog and web addresses). Do they know how to use/access the WWW to contact you? To they have copies of your passport and credit cards in case of emergency? Do you have a plan for them sending you money in an emergency? Have you established an expectation for contacting people back home (e.g., when you will call or email, how often you will call, etc.)?

Public Web Site: www.msu.edu/course/be/475/costarica/
Blog: cr2014studyabroad.wordpress.com/

7. **Housing** - secure or renew your lease for next year, find a sub-leaser, leave money for your rent, etc. Will someone take care of your driveway/yard/home for you? Have you left your belongings in a state that is safe and appropriate (e.g., think about the weather)?

8. **Renewals** - renew any license or certifications that will expire while you are gone (i.e., driver’s license, automobile, insurance, etc.).

9. **Prescriptions** - fill your medication and/or contact prescriptions. Make sure you bring the actual prescription form and your prescriptions in their original labeled containers, as you may need to show it at customs or get the meds refilled in an emergency. Buy any special medical products you use frequently, as they might not have an equivalent overseas.

10. **Flights** - Did you give your flight information to the person picking you up when you get home? Remind them to check the Internet for flight delays. Also, do you have your frequent flyer card or number for our airlines? Did you contact the flight about special dietary needs?
Money matters
Settle on the amount of money you will need while abroad. Friends with foreign experience or students who have participated in study abroad programs are excellent sources for advice on spending money and ways to save money while abroad. For conversion tables, consult the foreign exchange listings in a financial newspaper such as the Wall Street Journal or online at http://www.oanda.com/cgi-bin/ncc. Costa Rica currency is the Colon with a CRC label.

Most students access home funds through automated teller machines (ATMs). Many ATMs abroad will only access a checking account. **Do not leave your funds in a savings account before departure.** Otherwise, ATMs are used the same as they are here: your home checking account is debited for your withdrawal and you secure local currency. You are charged a service charge and the current exchange rate. Check with your local bank concerning use of ATMs abroad. A list of ATM cards available through MSU Federal Credit Union is available at the Credit Union. There is a small charge for using MSU related ATMs and debit cards overseas. **If you are ordering a card for the first time, please use it a few times before leaving.** In other words, make sure it works.

If you are nervous about security, you may want to carry some of your money in the form of traveler’s checks. To lock in a favorable exchange rate before you leave, you may wish to purchase traveler’s checks in the currencies of countries you plan to visit; however, traveler’s checks in U.S. dollars are accepted at banks abroad. Leave a copy of the serial numbers of your traveler’s checks at home; take another with you separate from the checks themselves. As you cash in the checks, keep a tally of which ones remain unredeemed. If you do carry traveler’s checks, realize you will need to have access to a bank to cash them in, and there are usually fees for both getting them here and cashing them later. Please note that you are charged a fee to purchase and cash traveler’s checks, and you must cash them at a bank or bureau d’ exchange, which makes using them hard at times. Some places in Costa Rica will accept U.S. dollars and U.S. dollars traveler’s checks.

Credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are honored abroad. Visa and MasterCard are most common, and Discover is fairly non-existent. Seek advice from the issuing company as to the card’s applicability abroad and the billing rate for converting the amount of purchases abroad into dollars; many companies charge a conversion fee for foreign purchases. Find out from your credit card company your credit limit and be sure not to charge over that amount on your trip. **Also, as with your bank, make sure your creditors know you are traveling overseas.**

The best way to assure you of adequate funds is to take more than the proposed budget. If your money runs out and you have a credit card, you have access to additional funds. If you are a Visa cardholder, take your card to a foreign bank for a cash advance. The amount available to you varies with the exchange rate, but averages $150. You can obtain a cash advance directly from an ATM machine or speak with somebody at the bank. If you choose to do the first option, you need to know the PIN number, (your credit card company will issue this information to you). If you choose to do the latter, the bank will enter your passport and credit card numbers into the central computer, so you can’t run down the street to another bank and do it again the same day.

Make sure to check, with the issuing company, that your ATM card and/or your credit cards are properly working. If they do not work properly the company will issue new ones, but this may take up to one-week. MSU Federal Credit Union will issue an ATM or Visa debit card at the branch office while you wait. A credit card replacement will be ordered and can take up to a week.

If your money runs out and you do not have an ATM card or credit cards to access funds, you have several alternatives, all based on the assumption that someone at home can send you money. Funds can be transferred or wired from home, but this process is very costly and complicated. People at home can
wire money to any bank, which takes about two weeks; or, using the local AMEX Office, it takes about a
day, but high fees may apply. Avoid the expense and hassle by bringing the necessary funds and sticking
to a budget.

Most ATM, debit, and credit cards will work overseas. The instructors recommend taking several forms
of money and a small amount of cash, rather than large amounts of travelers’ checks. Travelers’ checks
cost money to purchase and exchange, and they also require a bank or special location to redeem them.

If you take electronic forms of money, please make sure of the following:

- To use the ATM and debit cards, you usually need to have a checking account at your home
  bank, not just a savings account.

- Make sure you have multiple forms of money. Do not just take an ATM or a debit card, take
  both.

- Make sure someone at home has access to your bank account, in case you need money
  transferred or deposited.

- When in doubt about using an ATM machine overseas, try your US ATM card first. ATM
  cards are easier to replace and harder to “steal” money from than debit cards.

Tips for packing and luggage

Packing and Pre-Airport tips

- Make photocopies of your airline ticket, your passport, traveler’s checks, driver’s license, and
  the credit cards you take with you. Leave one set at home and keep another with you in a carry
  on bag or a separate place from the original items. Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or
  friends at home should they need to contact you in an emergency. NEVER pack your passport
  and other important documents in your checked luggage. Carry your passports, credit cards, and
  money in a money belt, pouch, fanny pack, or other device close to your body. Keep
  photocopies of these documents in a separate bag from the one the actual documents are in.

- Electrical service in Costa Rica is 110 watts and has identical plug configuration as the U.S. No
  electrical adapter is required.

- Keep your cell charger with you in your carry on bag, as you might have an emergency before
departure and need to use your phone.

- When packing, keep in mind that any object that could be used as a weapon (e.g., nail file,
tweezers, finger nail clippers, etc.) should be put in your checked luggage. Cigarette lighters and
other combustible materials are totally banned from any luggage. Also, see 3-1-1 list below
regarding liquids.

- When packing, remember that you also will have a set of clothes on your body. When dressing
  for the plane, we recommend that you wear comfortable clothing such as sweat-shirts and
  pants, running pants, jeans, etc. Remember that the more metal on your person (i.e., belts,
  shoes, jewelry, etc.) the more you will need to take on and off during security. Also, remember
  that you will be flying to someplace cooler than Michigan. Packing to dress in layers will help for
  various weather conditions.

- Before arriving at the airport, mark luggage tags clearly with your name, home address, and
  phone number and put this information inside your bags too.
- Make sure your bags are not locked before you check-in unless you have a TSA approved lock, or they will cut the locks off in Customs. Check with an insurance or travel agent about insuring your luggage and other personal effects if this issue concerns you.
- You will have to carry your own luggage. It is a good idea to pack your bags a few days early and try to carry them when you are tired. Eliminate items that are not essential. Do not pack anything you would hate to lose or have ruined. Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, expensive jewelry, or irreplaceable family objects.

**Tips for packing light**

1. Follow the packing guide.
2. Pack for layers so as to avoid bulky clothing.
3. Pack items that are mix and match.
4. Buy vacuum bags to help organize and compact the value of clothes.
5. Fill your bag up and carry it or walk with it around the block.

**Luggage Restrictions**

- Avoid oversize and overweight baggage. Airlines will charge you for overweight baggage or refuse to accept them. Overweight charges are your responsibility. We suggest a bag on wheels or a backpack-style piece of luggage. Leave room for items you purchase overseas, and remember to bring a messenger bag or backpack that you can carry during the day.
- Airlines restrict the amount of baggage that passengers can carry. Depending upon the airline, you may have to pay a fee for your checked baggage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carrier</th>
<th>Carry-on Bag</th>
<th>Checked Bag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various - check your specific carrier for weight and dimension restrictions.</td>
<td><strong>Size/Amount for Economy:</strong> Baggage Allowance: 1 + 1 personal item</td>
<td><strong>Size/Amount for Economy:</strong> Weight/Size: 23kg (50 lbs.) per piece. No one piece may exceed 62 linear inches (158cm) in combined length, width, and height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Weight/Size:</strong> 7kg (15lb) All items must easily fit into the overhead bin or under the seat in front of you. May not exceed 45 linear inches (or 115 cm) in combined length, width, and height including wheels and handles</td>
<td>United</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following items are allowed and do not count toward your one bag and one personal item limit:

- Jacket or umbrella
- Reading material
- Food or merchandise purchased in the airport

- To calculate the size of your baggage, use a tape measure to determine the three dimensions and add them as this example:

  \[30" + 20" + 12" = 62 \text{ inches}\]
Despite the fact that an airline will take two pieces of luggage for a fee, we request that you only pack one bag for the program. Small and light is better. We will be on a bus with limited luggage space.

- When packing your carry-on piece of luggage we suggest you include:
  1. Eyeglasses or an extra pair of contact lenses;
  2. The contact information, map, and directions of your destination;
  3. Medications (Keep medications in their original labeled container to make customs processing easier. If medications contain narcotics, carry a letter from your physician.);
  4. Needed toiletries;
  5. A sweater or sweatshirt;
  6. Reading material (a book not the library), music, puzzles, etc.; and
  7. An extra change of clothes (i.e., underwear and socks) in case your luggage gets lost.

3-1-1 Guidelines

- 3-1-1 for carry-ons = 3 ounce bottle or less; 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin. One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring.
- Consolidate bottles into one bag and X-ray separately to speed screening.
- Be prepared. Each time TSA searches a carry-on it slows down the line. Practicing 3-1-1 will ensure a faster and easier checkpoint experience.
- 3-1-1 is for short trips. If in doubt, put your liquids in checked luggage.
- Declare larger liquids. Prescription medications, baby formula and milk (when traveling with an infant or toddler) are allowed in quantities exceeding three ounces and are not required to be in the zip-top bag. Declare these items for inspection at the checkpoint.
- Carry-on baggage restrictions:
  - All liquids, aerosols and gels must be carried in containers of no greater than 100ml/3.3oz capacity (approximately 100gm in weight).
  - All containers must fit comfortably in a transparent, resealable plastic bag.
  - The plastic bag must be no greater than 1 litre in capacity with a total outer edge measurement of the sealed section of the bag no larger than 80cm.
  - There is a limit of one plastic bag per passenger.
  - The plastic bag must be removed from carry on baggage and presented to security personnel at the checkpoint for inspection and separate x-ray screening.
  - Containers larger than 100ml will not be accepted, even if only partially filled.
  - Liquids, aerosols and gels include, but are not limited to water and other drinks, soups, syrups, jams, stews, sauces and pastes;
  - foods in sauces or containing a high liquid content;
  - creams, lotions, cosmetics, oils and perfumes;
  - sprays;
  - gels including hair and shower gels;
  - contents of pressurized containers, including shaving foam, other foam and deodorants;
  - pastes including toothpaste;
  - liquid-solid mixtures;
  - mascara;
  - lipsticks;
  - lighters;
  - lip gloss or lip balm; and
  - any item of similar consistency at room temperature.
• Prescription medicine and non-prescription medicine is permitted provided the passenger can demonstrate a bona fide need for these items. Reasonable amounts of non-prescription medication required for the length of the flight are permitted. All medication may be subject to additional security checks.

Airport Departure and Check-In

Your departure
• You are leaving for an international flight, so you should plan to meet at the international departures desk at the appropriate airport terminal 2:00 to 2:30 hours before you leave.
• When checking in, you should have a copy of your electronic ticket and itinerary with all associated numbers and your passport.
• You should get boarding passes for all flights, or at least flights through to San Jose, Costa Rica – if you have problems ask the instructors
• Please note that you should check your luggage all the way through to our final destination – if you have problems, ask the instructors

Help us get through security quickly by packing and dressing with airport security in mind:
• Put all magnetic or materials that may be damaged in transit—credit cards, ATM cards, debit cards, film, lithium batteries, etc.—in your checked luggage.
• No sharp objects or things that could be consider weapons in your checked luggage.
• When going through security, remember that you will need to remove jackets, shoes, belts, large jewelry/watches, etc. Also, you will need to empty your pockets and take any laptops or liquids out of your bag for easier inspection (3-1-1 rule). As such, we recommend packing and dressing appropriately as you will need to go through security frequently and sometimes quickly.
• Always keep your carry-on luggage close to you! Do not leave it unattended.

Arriving in Costa Rica
1. While on the plane to San Jose, complete your incoming passenger card. You must complete this card before going into immigration/passport control. To complete this card, you will need to know:

• family name (last name), given name (first name), and passport number (inside cover of passport)
• flight number or name of ship (on boarding pass or plane paperwork)
• intended address in Costa Rica (in your course documents, put address for our first hotel)
• the country in which you boarded the flight/vessel (USA)
• their date of birth and usual occupation (student is your occupation)
• nationality as shown on their passport (look in passport)

You may also be asked about the issues below. Providing false information can affect your visa status.

• Migration status
• Health status
• Prior criminal convictions
• What you are bringing with you or where you have traveled recently

2. We will walk through to immigration, where you will wait in line to officially enter the country. You need your passenger card and passport. Please be prepared to give semi-coherent answers about why we are coming to Costa Rica.

3. We will then meet near the baggage claim and wait until everyone has their baggage.

4. We will then clear customs, where you will have your bags scanned again (maybe), searched (hopefully not), and turn in your passenger card. Note that there may be dogs sniffing your bags. Remember: FOOD can be an issue. Do not even take food off the plane, especially fruit, nuts, cheese, meats and jerky.

Returning home

1. The instructors may not be with you the entire way home, but going home is the opposite of coming into the country, so make sure you pay attention.

2. On the way home, you will also complete a passenger card to enter into the U.S. This card contains much of the same information as the card you completed to enter Costa Rica.

3. When arriving in the US, you will wait in line for immigration, have your passport stamped, then collect your luggage. Once you have your luggage, you will wait in a customs line, where they will collect your passenger cards.

4. Once you have gotten through customs, you will need to recheck your luggage at the transfer desk and then proceed to your departure terminal, which may be a different building than the terminal you arrive in.

U.S. Customs

• The government requires you to pay duty on goods purchased abroad and brought into the United States over $800. If you have spent more than $800, then you must pay a percentage of whatever you went over.

• Your exemption is $800 (retail value) on articles acquired abroad, if: articles are for personal use or gifts; articles accompany you; you have been out of the country at least 48 hours (Mexico and U.S. Virgin Islands are exempt from the 48 hour limitation); you have not claimed the exemption within the preceding 30 days; and articles are not prohibited or restricted.

• You must declare, including the price paid, everything acquired abroad that you bring home, including gifts given to you and articles worn or used. If you fail to declare or understate the value, penalties may be severe. You cannot bring meat, fruits, vegetables, and Cuban products (e.g., cigars) into the U.S., they will be taken away from you! **You are limited to the equivalent of two fifths of liquor (as long as one is native to the country visited) duty-free, and you must be 21 years old to bring it into the country.** Additional alcohol purchases are subject to tax (see customs’ document below for more information).

• You may mail packages home of up to $100. You cannot mail more than $100 of goods home per day to any single individual.

• You should know and understand these requirements before leaving, so there are no problems when you return. You must declare expensive and/or foreign goods before leaving the United States, so you are not charged duty on them when you return. If you own imported articles such as cameras, binoculars, watches, computers, etc., register them with Customs (before leaving the U.S.) to avoid extra duty charges upon re-entry. Fine art is exempt from duty charges.

• Upon your return, group purchases together and keep receipts for them ready for Customs inspection. Should you bring back foreign pharmaceuticals, have the prescriptions ready to present.
Packing List

Most travelers pack too much clothing. Take only what you expect to wear; learn what the typical climate is for the locations you plan to visit. Public laundry service is available at some locations. Use the following as a helpful guide for Costa Rica at this time of year:

**Clothing** – remember to double count items; for example, bring shoes (Merrill, Columbia, Keen) that are nice enough to wear with slacks, but rugged enough for walking.

- Rain jacket and rain pants
- Ballcap or visor for sun protection
- 1 pair of outdoor/hiking shoes (waterproof)
- 1 pair of casual/walking shoes
- 4-5 pairs of socks, some hiking socks
- 6-8 pairs of underwear
- 1 pair of jeans
- 1 pair of work pants
- 1-2 pairs of hiking, outdoor pants (e.g., jogging pants)
- 3-4 shirts
- 2-3 under/t-shirts
- Light fleece/sweatshirt (something for warmth)
- Bathing suit

Other suggestions:
- 1 pair of sandals/shoes for walking to the bathroom or showering (Crocs work great)
- 1-2 pairs of shorts

**General Tips:** dress in layers, modular clothing works well (e.g., pants that zip into shorts or a jacket with a fleece and outer shell), pack items that are mix and match, pack for hiking and being outside, pack items that are washable in the sink.

**Medicine and Toiletries** – Remember that you can buy items there, but they may be more expensive or limited in availability. DO NOT FORGET ABOUT AIRPORT LIQUID REGULATIONS.

- Insect Repellent (30-40% Deet)
- Sunscreen
- Prescription medicines with their documentation
- Cold/sinus medicine (buy sample sizes)
- Comb and/or brush
- Common products you use at home, and may need
- Deodorant/antiperspirant
- Eyeglasses, sunglasses, contact lenses and cleaning solution
- First-aid kit materials
- Kleenex (travel size)
- Nail clippers
- Pain killer (aspirin, ibuprofen, Tylenol)
- Shaving supplies
- Comb, brush, and hair products
- Skin care products, cosmetics
- Soap and shampoo
- Tampons/Sanitary pads
- Q-tips
- Ziploc bags for all liquids and gels

Other suggestions:
- Ear plugs
- Travel/camp towel (towels provided at accommodations, but some students want a spare for other activities or emergencies)

**Miscellaneous** – easy to forget, but still important

- Watch (dual time zone with alarm is great)
- Small Flashlight
- Alarm clock (or use a watch, phone or iPod)
- Camera (w/memory and charger)
- Water bottle
- Address book/labels for postcards
- Music (player, cords, and media)
- Extra batteries
- Laundry detergent (single load or sink size)

Other suggestions:
- Day pack
- Money belt or safe-storage device
- Travel pillow (for plane)
- Playing cards/travel games

**General Tips:** PURCHASE PHONE CARDS AND INTERNET HOURS Abroad; **We Do Not Recommend Bringing Your Computer**

**Documents** – DO NOT FORGET THESE ITEMS

- Tickets
- PASSPORT
- Cash, ATM card, debit card, credit cards (call your bank/credit union to inform them of your travel)
- Academic and course packet/information
- Drivers license/Student ID Cards
- Emergency Contact Information
- Insurance Information
- Pen and Paper

Other suggestions:
- Personal/travel journal
- Books, guides, and maps about your destination
- Personal reading

**General Climate for December:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Average High</th>
<th>Average Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Jose/Alajuela 2 days</td>
<td>High 80s</td>
<td>Low 70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiliran</td>
<td>Mid 80s</td>
<td>Low 70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Mid 80s</td>
<td>Low 70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monte Verde</td>
<td>Mid 60s</td>
<td>Mid 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Selva</td>
<td>Low 80s</td>
<td>Low 70s</td>
</tr>
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<td>San Jose/Alajuela 4 days</td>
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