

Centro Panamericano de Idiomas, 1998
Monteverde, Heredia, Costa Rica

I studied for 4 weeks with Centro Panamericano de Idiomas. I spent 3 weeks at their Monteverde site and 1 in San Joaquin which is a suburb of Heredia, which is more or less a suburb of San Jose. The school was excellent. The teachers I had were patient, the classes were good, and the curriculum was well organized and seemed to cover most of what you'd need for conversation. The classes were almost entirely in Spanish and some of the teachers spoke almost no English. Classes had 1-4 people, and included more and more conversation as I became more fluent. I took 4 hours of class per day. The people who opted for 5 ½ hours a day usually got 1 on 1 conversation practice from 1 to 2:30 after lunch. Most of them said they would have liked to have a few afternoons free instead of having class every day. It is possible to take the extra classes some weeks and not others. Ask Jonle.

I had taken a few years of Spanish in junior high, and I think people who even had a minimal background got more out of it. People who spoke absolutely no Spanish coming in seemed more frustrated. Any studying ahead of time, even just learning a few Spanish words or phrases, seemed to help. Many people had just taken an introductory night school course, and said it had been helpful. Arrangements: Jonle is an American (bilingual) who deals with most of the email (anajarro@sol.racsa.co.cr) She's very helpful!

Money: Take American Express travelers checks. Some places wouldn't accept bank travelers' checks (there's an AMEX office downtown, on W 6th I think). Nobody takes MasterCard, many places take American Express, but most places that accept credit cards take Visa. Just because some place has a sign saying they take credit cards doesn't mean they actually do. Often, they used to take them in the past. It's hard to get Colones in Cleveland. You'll be able to exchange money at the airport that flies direct to San Jose (Miami or Texas) and it might be useful to buy a little money before you go to pay for cabs and hotel. Many places accept American travelers' checks or dollars though, so if you can't exchange you probably won't be stuck. Check with your bank before you leave to make sure you can use the cash machines there. Sometimes they have to pre-authorize. There are no cash machines anywhere close to Monteverde. You can pay for school by personal check. I ended up spending about \$120 – 150 per weekend for travel, including hotel, transportation and food, and another \$20-50 during the week on meals, trips, etc.

Stuff to Bring:

- Don't bring anything you can't stand to lose. There is very little personal crime (no muggings that I heard of) but lots of pickpockets, grabbing of unattended bags and breaking into locked tour buses. Bring a Xerox of your passport and airline ticket, and carry those with you, leaving the actual with the family you are staying with.
- An old sheet or your sleeping bag. Most homes and many hotels only put on sheet on the bed. Some of the hotel sheets were a little bit scary. Towel and washcloth are a good idea too.
- Definitely a Spanish- English dictionary. A pocket one is sufficient for what I needed. Some people had 501 Spanish Verbs or some sort of grammar book, which seemed to be helpful
- Hiking boots were more useful than sneakers in Monteverde.

Volunteering: There are many clinics and a nice hospital near the Heredia site, if you're interested in working. La doctora in Monteverde was not at all interested in having students work with her, so don't count on any medical experiences there. There are a lot of eco-tourist sites and projects if you feel like you want to volunteer there. The school can help you find them.