

PERSONAL FUNDS ABROAD

The Experiment Costa Rica: Climate & the Environment – Spanish Language Immersion

Tuition includes accommodation and meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) throughout the program. When meals are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend. The Experiment will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the scheduled program itinerary. While standard program expenses are covered, remember that snacks and activities you may choose to do outside of the planned itinerary (including time with your host family) are not included.

This information will help you prepare now so The Experiment participant will be able to access money while abroad.

In general, it is quite common in Costa Rica to pay by card at major retailers, with the exception of small merchants and street vendors. So, you must be able to get cash in the local currency to use for smaller purchases, such as drinks and snacks, and you may opt to use a card for bigger purchases if the merchant accepts cards. There will most likely be an international transaction fee every time you make a purchase with a card abroad.

The quickest and cheapest way to get cash while traveling abroad is directly from an ATM. Currency Exchange offices at airports and elsewhere take longer and have high rates, fees, and commission. Exchange options vary in quality and convenience, especially for minors.

Some portions of the program are in more remote places, so there will be limited access to getting money. Please plan accordingly with your group leaders. While many places in Costa Rica accept US dollars, some do not, and you should expect to use Costa Rican colones.

The Experiment

A Program of World Learning

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BEFORE-YOU-GO CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Check your bank's international transaction and ATM fees
- ☐ Know how to get in touch with your bank in the case of loss or theft of debit/credit cards.
- ☐ Check the local exchange rate to the U.S. dollar
- ☐ You must have \$100 in the account available in case of emergency medical treatment. It is the participant's responsibility to cover personal medical-related expenses during program, i.e. clinic visit, prescriptions, medical supplies.
- ☐ Recommended personal spending money : \$300-\$600, this varies from student to student so you may budget more or less depending on spending plans. This includes the following, but not limited to the following:
 - *Travel days:* given the nature of travel and travel delays, please budget at least \$25 / meal for your travel days to/from program.
 - *Laundry:* Laundry is available in hotels/lodges you will visit. Laundry by the bag costs approximately US\$5 - \$10, or can be charged at least US\$1.00 per piece.
 - *Personal expenses,* such as additional snacks, drinks, souvenirs
- ☐ Most local stores and cafes do not accept large bills (\$50 or \$100-bills), smaller bills are recommended.

Please Note: Some places (supermarkets and stores) will ask for an ID to be present when using a credit card, such as a student ID or driver's license (not passport).

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Experimenters to access cash abroad, these are our recommendations. The Experiment **does not** endorse a particular card or bank.

- Acquire a VISA or MasterCard debit card that is linked to an international interbank network. (See FAQs below.) You will need one in the Experimenter's name with direct access to an account with funds and a PIN, or personal identification number. You may need to set up a new checking account in the participant's name. A great option is an account that parents/guardians and participants manage together). With these accounts, parents/guardians can check balances, add funds online, and take immediate action from home if a card is lost or stolen.
- If you plan to use a prepaid card such as a Reloadable Prepaid Visa Card, check with the financial institution that the card will work in the program country. While you risk some losses if these cards are lost or stolen, quickly reporting this minimizes loss and some come with protections.
- Visa Gift Cards and other similar cards DO NOT work abroad.
- Carrying cash to exchange is not recommended but you may choose to do so as back-up. However, you should not plan to rely on cash alone. Do not bring more than \$50-\$100 USD in back-up cash, if any. Exchange places will NOT accept bills before the 2003 series or old or damaged bills, so bring crisp bills.
- Do not plan on wiring money. Wire money only in emergencies, if it is an option in the destination.

- It is okay to also bring a credit card for purchases or emergencies, but it is necessary that you are able to access cash from an ATM. Note that some foreign card readers in stores or restaurants may ask for a PIN even when using a credit card for which you usually would sign in the U.S. Again, ask for a chip-and-PIN card.

TIPS:

- Use bank-owned ATMs when possible, choosing to be charged in the local currency (not USD).
- Before using an international ATM, research the bank fees, i.e. non-bank ATM usage fees, ATM operator access fees, international transaction fees for currency conversion. Fees can be charged by both the international bank as well as your home bank. t you may be able to avoid or limit some fees by using ATMs of banks that partner with your bank.
- Some international ATMs only support four-digit PINs. Be sure your PIN doesn't start with a zero and know your PIN by its numbers, since some international ATMs do not have letters on the keypad.
- Avoid carrying all your money/cards in one place and keep them in a secure place (i.e. crossbody bag, money belt) Have a daily routine for checking card + cash.

WHEN CARDS DON'T WORK:

TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS: remember that when participants are unable to access money while on an Experiment program, it is most likely not an emergency. Food, accommodations, and other essentials are always provided for participants, so you don't have to worry that there is any threat posed to those who cannot immediately access personal cash. Contacting The Experiment for issues concerning accessing personal funds abroad should be done during normal business hours.

LOST OR STOLEN CARDS:

It's important that you are prepared to report cards that are lost or stolen. Some options are:

1. Get a shared account so that parents or guardians can manage the issue from home.
2. Otherwise, leave a photocopy of both sides of each card at home so parents or guardians are able to report any problems on the Experimenter's behalf or perhaps replace the card. You must establish with your bank before travel who has permission to request such transactions.
3. Obtain the numbers for the global customer assistance offices for each of your credit/debit cards and financial institutions. Know exactly how to report a damaged, lost, or stolen debit or credit card and how to promptly replace it wherever you are.

USING TAP-TO-PAY ABROAD:

There are tap-to-pay, or contactless-enabled places such as supermarkets, restaurants, and major retailers in Costa Rica. **If you are using this type of payment, your phone will need to have access to data or Wifi.**

- Look for official payment terminals
- Keep your phone locked between uses
- Do not hand your phone to a cashier or vendor
- For transit systems (if applicable), tap in and out with the *same* device.

- Expect occasional declines – try another card or use cash.

Safety & Privacy:

- Use a secure passcode on your device.
- Turn on Find My iPhone/Find My Device.
- Know how to remotely freeze card payments if needed.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I bring my parent/guardian's ATM card?

No. The card(s) should be in your name. You may be required to show proof it is your card.

Will my ATM card work abroad?

This largely depends on you: Have you informed your bank that you are traveling, so they do not assume your card is being used fraudulently? Have you confirmed with your bank that your card will work in your destination country? Are you sure you know your PIN? **Memorize your PIN.** It happens more frequently that students forget their PIN than have it stolen. If you bring a credit card, check if a PIN is required as well.

Do all types of credit/debit cards work abroad?

Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted. PLUS (Visa) and Maestro/Cirrus (MasterCard) are the most common debit networks. American Express or Discover has limited international acceptance, so advised not to bring. Visa or MasterCard cards will most likely work at most ATMs in your destination, but the debit card's network symbol, such as PLUS or Cirrus, must match the ATM.

What happens if my card does not work abroad?

If you get to your destination and find that your card does not work, The Experiment will work with your parents/guardian on a case-by-case basis. The Experiment cannot be in the practice of lending money to students, but we may be able to make a one-time transaction via the Group Leaders with written confirmation from parents or guardians agreeing to be responsible for that amount. This option is not guaranteed, and all steps should be taken to avoid this scenario.

How much money should I have in my account linked to my ATM card?

This is up to you and your parents/guardians. Money matters are personal, and you could choose to spend minimally, or you could choose to take extra money for shopping or other expenses. You must, however, have some personal money available on program.

All participants must also have up to **\$100** available and set aside in their bank account for medical expenses, i.e. should they need to go to a medical clinic, purchase prescriptions or medication due to illness/injury on program. Note that with proper documentation, medical expenses related to accidents and illness can be filed as claims with the travel insurance.

The Experiment recommends that you have access to about \$300 - \$600 in funds total (though you may choose to spend less), depending on your intended spending, destination, and length of program. However, the best way to ensure you have enough is if your parents/guardians are able to add money to your account while you are abroad, if needed.

Should I take cash?

We recommend withdrawing cash from the ATM in-country. Exchange rates for cash are higher than what you will be charged using ATMs. There are also additional fees and commission rates. You may choose to have some cash with you just in case, but you should not plan on going on your program with nothing but cash. The Experiment is not responsible for the loss or theft of the participants' personal spending cash.

Program Cash: Stipends

At times, participants will be given a stipend, cash for meals when not taken with the group during the program. It is the participant's responsibility to keep this cash safe and to only spend the budgeted allotment for meals. The Experiment is not responsible for the mismanagement, loss, or theft of participants' stipends.

Can I get money wired?

It is very expensive and difficult to wire money to some countries; in some cases, it may not be possible at all, as even Western Union locations on their website are often no longer open. You should only resort to wiring money in emergencies, if it is possible; try to avoid emergencies by confirming with your bank that your card will work in your destination country.