



## Center for International Programs & Sustainability Studies

Course name: Ecotourism: The Case of Costa Rica

Course code: GEB 3500

Total contact hours: 60 hours

Pre-requisite: None

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide the students with an introduction to Costa Rican ecotourism. It will offer the chance to analyze this dynamic process from different socio-economic perspectives. It will discuss the economic importance of ecotourism for the Costa Rican national economy, the stimulation of grassroots, community ecotourism projects, and the role of ecotourism in securing environmental protection. The advances and limitations of ecotourism will be explored.

Students will be encouraged to develop their own conclusions about how ecotourism can help to secure economic, environmental, and participatory alternatives in order to advance the Costa Rican sustainable development process.

The course will be structured in three parts:

*PART ONE:* Building the case for ecotourism: Definitions, history, and the context of ecotourism in Costa Rica.

*PART TWO:* Costa Rica's policy framework and institutional commitment to ecotourism. The development of ecotourism in the regional and national setting.

*PART THREE:* Costa Rica's ecotourism sector. Projects, case studies and conclusions explored.

## **AUDIENCE**

This course is structured for international students attending the Study Abroad Program at an LCI Education university campus. However, courses are not exclusive to foreigners so local degree-seeking students may enroll in this course. Some of the courses are also taught in Spanish as part of our Bachelor's in Sustainability Management or Business Administration programs.

This is a theoretical-practical course and explores/responds to the following inquiry according to the professional/disciplinary profile:

**What is the quality of the Costa Rican ecotourism experience and how can this be qualified? What major advances are taking place and what are the pertinent problems that need to be addressed to move toward authentic ecotourism? How can solutions be developed to challenge the negative impacts of tourism? How to detect opportunities to stimulate ecotourism and improve its authenticity? And how to empower local communities and marginal groups in this process?**

In order to respond this question, we will study the following **generative topics**:

- Brief introduction to the types of tourism and the tourism industry.
- Definitions of alternative tourisms, sustainable tourism, and ecotourism.
- The Costa Rican context development of conservation context.
- The history and development of the Costa Rican ecotourism process.
- Weak and strong sustainability frameworks.
- Weak and strong ecotourism practices.
- Certification for sustainable tourism.
- Complementary certification and private enterprise innovations for ecotourism.
- Major advances in the ecotourism industry.
- Major obstacles for ecotourism businesses and settings.
- Case study exploration and comparison.

- Agro-ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism at a local level.
- Volunteer-tourism and service learning.

Students will develop a critical understanding of the Costa Rican ecotourism process through observing and experiencing Costa Rica's ecotourism process at first hand, and through active participation in week-end fieldtrips where students will have a chance to understand local dynamics of ecotourism projects.

Along the course, the following **skills** will be fostered:

- To participate and collaborate actively in the group tasks.
- Ability to develop confidence, solidarity, cordiality, and skills in communal task management.
- Contribute to the consolidation of a team and teamwork, promoting communication, equal distribution of tasks and a working environment encouraging calm and cohesion.
- Team-work development and leadership.
- To integrate knowledge, abilities, and the necessary attitudes to be able to learn the techniques of teamwork and leadership (considering the tutorials and evaluations).

Among the **values** and **attitudes** that will be promoted among students are the following:

- How to communicate with others.
- Problem and challenge identification.
- Participation to inspire confidence and empathy.
- Responsible communication and profound listening.
- Critical thinking.
- Systemic thinking and understanding.

## COMPETENCIES, CRITERIA AND EVIDENCE

The competencies for the Veritas University are reflexive and integral actions that respond to the professional profile and to the problems of the context, with suitability and ethical commitment, integrating the know-how, the know-how, and the knowledge to know in a perspective of improvement.

Below are both the disciplinary and general competencies, linked to their criteria and evidence of performance for this course.

Competencies	Key Competency	Learning Assessments
Evaluate the Costa Rican ecotourism and the variety of practices, institutions and stakeholders emerging with the development of the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evaluate the ecotourism sector and its development in the context of the tourism industry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Case study analysis</li> <li>○ Interaction (and first hand research with different projects, site visits and fieldtrips – if field trips included)</li> <li>○ Observation and collection of data.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Critically assess successes and failures in the application of ecotourism and measure its authenticity in relation to social livelihood approaches and participation approaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comparative research reports</li> <li>○ Possible Interviews</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Analyze the standards, indicators and outcomes for implementing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Case study analysis</li> <li>○ Research reports</li> </ul>

	ecotourism through the certification processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Design and execute interviews – possible.</li> </ul>
<b>General</b>	<b>Key Competency</b>	<b>Evidence of Learning</b>
To integrate knowledge, abilities and necessary attitudes in order to learn in a continuous manner throughout life from keen appreciation and understanding of other experiences and struggles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Problem and challenge identification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Case study research and comparisons.</li> </ul>
Participate and collaborate actively in the team tasks, strengthening confidence, cordiality, shared goals and teamwork.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How to work and get on with others.</li> <li>○ Search for solutions through dialogue and deliberation.</li> <li>○ Negotiation to inspire confidence and empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fieldtrips, group work, and site visits. (This dynamic is changed if it is online only)</li> </ul>
Direct work groups, assuring the integration of all members and group assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How to communicate with others.</li> <li>○ Work in teams and leadership</li> <li>○ Responsible communication and profound listening.</li> <li>○ Problem and challenge identification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collaborative tasks</li> </ul>

## **COURSE CONTENT**

(One theme each week, plus conclusions, practical activities, and finals)

### **Theme 1: Introduction to the tourism industry**

- a) Introduction to the global tourism industry.
- b) Introduction to the regional and local tourism sectors.
- c) Global, regional and local institutions for ecotourism (WTO, ICT)
- d) Data and indicators for understanding the tourism industry.

### **Theme 2: Definitions of tourism, ecotourism and alternative tourisms.**

- a) Traditional tourism – definitions and sectors.
- b) Alternative tourism – definitions and sectors.

### **Theme 3: The socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism**

- a) The socio-economic and environmental context.
- b) The socio-cultural impacts of tourism and ecotourism.
- c) The environmental impacts of tourism and ecotourism.
- d) Community and biological Case studies and indicators.
- e) Social, environmental, biological, and cultural carrying capacity.

### **Theme 4: The historical development of alternative tourism in the framework of sustainability.**

- a) The case Costa Rica
- b) The ecotourism policy framework at a municipal council level.
- c) Laws, planning and regulatory frameworks for ecotourism.
- d) Principles and practices: Codes, design, advances, and limits.

### **Theme 5: Alternative tourisms and specific case studies**

- a) Ecotourism and case studies.
- b) Sustainable tourism and case studies.
- c) Socio-cultural tourism and case studies.
- d) Volunteer tourism and service-learning cases studies.

### **Theme 6: Ecotourism and certification**

- a) Global and regional certification processes and practice.
- b) The case of Costa Rica, CST and the Blue Flag.

### **Theme 7: Rural and Urban Ecotourism**

- a) Urban ecotourism.
- b) Rural tourism and case studies.
- c) Agro-ecotourism and case studies.

### **Theme 8: Local communities and grassroots initiatives**

- a) Indigenous communities and ecotourism.
- b) Gender, women's groups and ecotourism.

### **Theme 9: Conservation, national Parks and ecotourism**

- a) Case study: Cahuita and local participation.
- b) Case study: Poas and national planning.
- c) Case study: Manuel Antonio and Santa Rosa.
- d) Case study: Monteverde.

### **Theme 10: Conclusions and solutions**

- a) Comparison of case studies.
- b) Innovations and improvements.

Please note that if the course is given online the order of some of these themes may change.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this course the activities are planned at an intermediate level and stimulate learning through research and preparation of interviews, field trip research, case studies, essays,

discussions and through consideration of the basic aspects of the fundamentals in strategic and systemic thinking.

The methodology encourages learning through student interaction with real life scenarios, problem identification, and problem solving in relation to environmental policy and sustainability issues and dynamics and with an aim to detect opportunities for learning and self-development. Finally, the method focuses on providing students with situations that they will go on to encounter in their professional lives and careers, thus enhancing competency and experience.

The methodology is planned as experiential learning using Paolo Freire's educational guidelines, from a constructivist perspective and, the competency-based model.

Classes are of an interactive nature, stimulating the collective construction of knowledge; so, the students can recognize, by their own means, the context in which they are and how they can use it to understand the topics of the course for use in their future careers.

Along the course the expository method is used both by the professor and by students, individually and in groups, always promoting the participation of the students through their direct intervention in discussions, extension of concepts and analysis of the topics exposed. Since research is a pillar of the subject, the subjects to be discussed and exhibited in class and in the different assignments, are firstly investigated at a bibliographic level by the students, as a prerequisite to present group and individual work products.

The role of the professor is to mediate, facilitate and guide the teaching and learning process, allowing students to build and self-regulate learning, based on their previous and significant knowledge; the student is active, the teaching-learning process is collective and socialized. It also fosters social integration, the development of group work skills, community feeling and respect, without neglecting individualization.



## EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

In order to guarantee good development of the course, therefore, to guarantee learning, the following resources are available: an updated bibliographic database, multimedia equipment that students can use for their individual presentations; whiteboards and other school equipment for weekly sessions, and readings provided by the educator.

Most of the lessons will take place in the classroom. During independent work periods, students will be able to attend the institution.

A campus library, study rooms, and computer labs are available for the students' independent work time. Free Wi-Fi connection for students, educators, and staff is provided on campus, which gives students the possibility to work not only in the library or computer labs, but also around campus.

## LEARNING ASSESSMENT

In order to make the course or program better competencies-based evaluation compiles and evaluates evidence by taking into account feedback providing pre-established criteria. The course evaluation must be aligned with the competencies and the teaching methodology. There is a rubric for each evaluation resource, and the details will be provided in **CANVAS LMS**. Even though the rubric grants a grade, it is also a quantitative and qualitative description of the students' performance. The rubrics include the core and discipline key competences.

ASSIGNMENTS	WIEIGHT/GRADE
Participation, enthusiasm, and attitude.	<b>10%</b>
Reading assignments and discussion work (forums, mind-maps, summaries, week's activities, and tasks)	<b>15%</b>
2 Case Studies – Project or region exploration and comparisons: (10% each) Possible Choices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The case of Costa Rica – Monteverde ecotourism</li> </ul>	<b>20%</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The case of Costa Rica – Pacific coast development and ecotourism examples</li> <li>○ The case of Costa Rica – National parks, conservation, and ecotourism</li> <li>○ The case of Costa Rica – Marine issues and ecotourism</li> <li>○ Rural tourism and sustainable farms</li> <li>○ Nature and alternative tourisms</li> <li>○ Ecolodges</li> <li>○ The case of Costa Rica - free theme</li> </ul>	
<p>The case of Costa Rica – Legal and Policy frameworks for ecotourism – CST case studies and certification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Two or three CST hotels analyzed and compared</li> </ul>	<b>20%</b>
Field Trip participation grade and investigation	<b>10%</b>
Final project/paper (paper = 20% and presentation = 5%)	<b>25%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## LEARNING STRATEGIES

The following learning strategies will be developed:

### 1. Case Studies and Interviews

Learning through case studies educates students in three essential aspects: knowledge management, reflective practices, and the ability to adapt to change. Knowledge management seeks that the student acquires strategies and techniques that allow him/her to learn by him/herself; this implies the awareness of assimilation, reflection, and interiorization of knowledge so the student can finally value and deepen from a personal choice.

The case study method promotes the learning of three basic aspects: the management of knowledge, reflective practice and contemplation and design of solutions. Two case

studies will be explored and evaluated. The cases will be summarized according to the main actors, events, issues, dates and outcomes (and according to answering the following pattern for case study analysis: who was involved, where, when, what happened, how and why?). The major issues will be highlighted and illustrated with clear examples from the case studies or similar cases. Major indicators and data will be extracted and discussed for its relevance and meaning. Solutions will be discussed and suggested. Students will choose the case studies according to their interests within the following possible areas.

#### Case Studies: Possible Choices:

- The case of Costa Rica – Monteverde ecotourism.
- The case of Costa Rica – Pacific coast development and ecotourism examples.
- The case of Costa Rica – National parks, conservation and ecotourism.
- The case of Costa Rica – Marine issues and ecotourism.
- The case of Costa Rica – Legal and Policy frameworks for ecotourism.
- The case of Costa Rica - free theme.

Students will identify the problematic and major contentious issues, evaluate, discuss, and report on the solvability of the case. Solutions will be provided based on observations, similar cases, and discussion outcomes.

The case studies will be evaluated through the following criteria:

### 2. Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay as an academic writing tool allows each student to express opinions, interpret, and evaluate one or more topics by formally including adequate justification. The point is to show evidence of research and to demonstrate the ability to compose argument explanations clearly.

### 3. Group Work and Workshops

Workshops, involving role play, will promote shared spaces in which students, working as a team, will develop their oral and written communication skills, synthesis,

leadership, listening and relating well with others when dealing with sustainability issues.

#### 4. Presentations

Individual and group presentations will provide opportunities to communicate orally and iconically, share the results of research, and demonstrate the appropriation of topics of interest.

#### 5. Reports and discussions

Students will exercise the capacity of critical thinking, and oral and written expression through the presentation of reports and discussions about videos or documentaries with respect to the course themes.

#### 6. Presentation of results

Individual and group presentations of the results of analysis and research of almost all activities will develop in students the ability to communicate orally and graphically to demonstrate knowledge assimilated through assignments. Students must also present their action proposal in order to demonstrate their convincing communication skills in English or Spanish (depending on their native language).

#### 7. Field Trips

This course has two weekend fieldtrips. Students can only miss one of the fieldtrips, but only if they have another class which requires their attendance on a fieldtrip.

Students will be given the fieldtrips dates during the first or second week of the course.

### ATTENDANCE

#### Regarding classes:

1. Students are only allowed a two (2) **non-consecutive (back-to-back) class absences**. A student shall fail the course if more than two absences are registered

by the professor. Administration does not control attendance.

2. Three **late arrivals** to class (arrival after the first 15 minutes) are treated as one absence. Attending class 30 minutes late without an official justification will also count as an absence.
3. In the case of an **absence from any assignment evaluated in class** (presentations, evaluations, field trips, etc.) a student will be given a grade of zero unless an official document is presented within **one week** of the absence.
4. If a student presents an official document to excuse the absence, the missed assignment is to be presented on that same day.

#### **Regarding field trips:**

5. An unjustified **absence on a field trip** will immediately result in the loss of all points assigned to that specific trip. However, if an official document justifying the absence is presented, 50% of the assignment points may be obtained upon presentation of a complementary research assignment, to be agreed upon with the professor, within one week of the field trip.
6. An absence on a field trip may be justified should two course field trips coincide. In such a case, and to avoid losing points, students shall be able to opt for carrying out a research assignment.

### **CODE OF CONDUCT**

Professors have the right to expel a student from the classroom should he / she/ they:

1. Be disruptive in the classroom.
2. Behave in a disrespectful way.
3. Be under the influence of alcohol.
4. Be under the influence of any illegal drug.
5. Shows hygiene or odor problems that may disturb other students.

## ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The use of cell phones, smartphones, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive and is therefore prohibited during class. **Please turn all devices OFF and put them away** when class begins. Devices may be used only when the professor assigns a specific activity and allows the use of devices for internet search or recording. Those who fail to comply with the rule must leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. Using devices while the professor or other peers are lecturing, or presenting is perceived as a lack of interest and disrespectful.

## STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM POLICIES

The student must comply with the provisions of the Study Abroad Program Policies available on the Canvas/Omnivox platform.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is subject to change and updating. The final and more recent version can be found on the student portal and will be shared at the beginning of term. You will not be expected to buy any books for this course.

**Please note that copies in English will be provided, and the content of the bibliography will be updated at the beginning of each new course. Readings can be found on the student portal and students will be given instructions on reading material and summaries.**

**Bibliography (readings to be found on the student portal).** This includes class readers and reference material for the preparation of classes. Please ask for any of the following if not found on the portal.

## CHRONOGRAM

Week	Competency	Content	Teaching strategies
1	Analyze the central concepts and theoretical frameworks in relation to	Theme 1: Introduction to the tourism industry  a) Introduction to the global tourism industry  b) Introduction to the regional and local tourism sectors	Introduction to the course, assignments, tools, methods and expectations.
2	ecotourism.  Understand some of the main features of the development of the tourism sector and its main impacts.  Define the different types of tourism.  Discuss the development shifts toward sustainability.	Continuation theme 1:  c) Global, regional and local institutions for ecotourism (WTO, ICT)  d) Data and indicators for understanding the tourism industry  Theme 2: Definitions of tourism, ecotourism and alternative tourisms.  a) Traditional tourism – definitions and sectors  b) Alternative tourism – definitions and sectors	Lecture and discussion  Group work and discussion:  Identification of tourisms / Defining core concepts.

3	<p>Discuss the importance of the legal framework that responds to ecotourism and sustainability through the study of the international declarations, conventions, and policies.</p>	<p>Theme 3: The socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f) The socio-economic and environmental context</li> <li>g) The socio-cultural impacts of tourism and ecotourism</li> <li>h) The environmental impacts of tourism and ecotourism</li> <li>i) Community and biological Case studies and indicators</li> <li>j) Social, environmental, biological and cultural carrying capacity</li> </ul>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Reading and discussion</p>
4		<p>Theme 4: The historical development of alternative tourism in the framework of sustainability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The case Costa Rica</li> <li>b) The ecotourism policy framework at a municipal council level</li> </ul>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Group work and discussion: Theories and concepts.</p> <p>Reading and discussion</p>



		<p>c) Laws, planning and regulatory frameworks for ecotourism</p> <p>d) Principles and practices: Codes, design, advances and limits.</p>	
5		<p>Theme 5: Alternative tourisms and specific case studies</p> <p>a) Ecotourism and case studies</p> <p>b) Sustainable tourism and case studies</p> <p>c) Socio-cultural tourism and case studies</p> <p>d) Volunteer tourism and service learning cases studies</p>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Individual work present 2 case study findings.</p>
6		<p>Theme 6: Ecotourism and certification</p> <p>c) Global and regional certification processes and practice</p> <p>d) The case of Costa Rica, CST and the Blue Flag.</p>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Group work, comparison and discussion of CST hotels findings.</p>

7		<p>Theme 7: Rural and Urban Ecotourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d) Urban ecotourism</li> <li>e) Rural tourism and case studies</li> <li>f) Agro-ecotourism and case studies</li> </ul>	<p>Group work and discussion: Case Studies.</p> <p>Group work and discussion: Case Study development.</p>
8	<p>Analyze case studies, vulnerabilities and advances.</p> <p>Evaluate the quality</p>	<p>Theme 8: Local communities and grassroots initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c) Indigenous communities and ecotourism</li> <li>d) Gender, women's groups and ecotourism.</li> </ul>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Case Study development.</p> <p>Analyzing indicators and case study findings.</p>
9	<p>of the Certification for Sustainable Tourism.</p> <p>Discuss, reflect upon and search for solutions.</p>	<p>Theme 9: Conservation, national Parks and ecotourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) Case study: Cahuita and local participation</li> <li>f) Case study: Poas and national planning</li> <li>g) Case study: Manuel Antonio and Santa Rosa</li> <li>h) Case study: Monteverde</li> </ul>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Case Study development.</p> <p>Analyzing indicators and case study findings.</p>

10		<p>Theme 10: Conclusions and solutions</p> <p>a) Comparison of case studies</p> <p>b) Innovations and improvements</p>	<p>Lecture and discussion</p> <p>Development of conclusions, solutions and recommendations for policy development.</p>
11		FINAL WORKSHOPS	<p>Research work in groups: Identification of vulnerabilities, advances, policy gaps, key illustrative indicators.</p> <p>Workshop: compare cases, indicators, recommendations.</p>
12	<p>Analyze case studies, vulnerabilities and advances.</p> <p>Discuss, reflect upon and search for solutions.</p> <p>Develop recommendations.</p>	FINAL PRESENTATIONS and EVALUATIONS	Present reports, interviews and final case study conclusions.