

Alright! Welcome. I have quite a few things to mention, living in Oregon and then staying in Costa Rica, so let's get into it. Starting with the first thing I learned here at the Las Cruces Biological Research Station. Toilet paper, after you have used it, goes in a trash can by the toilet; it does not get flushed. I learned this on my first night when I was texting my supervisor, asking if the sign in the bathroom meant what I thought it meant. It did! Toilet paper goes in the trash, not the toilet, due to their septic tank, but it is also a cultural thing, I believe.

Next up, car things! Something I observed on my very long bus ride to the station, and also during my time in town, is that people in Costa Rica do not use their car horns like people in the United States do. My bus driver honked at *every single* bus that passed. I asked my supervisor what it meant, and it turns out that people here use their horns to honk at people they know, as a way to say hello. Considering that Costa Rica is a collectivist culture, this friendliness makes sense. They also use their horns like we use fog lights sometimes, to let someone know they can go first at an intersection. Finally, traffic here is less organized than traffic in the US, and many people own motorcycles. There are motorcycles everywhere because they allow people to dart between cars, which you will see often.

Okay, going to town. Here at the research station, the nearest town I spend time in is San Vito. I can walk there for 2-3 hours one way through the forest, or I can take a 15-minute bus ride that costs 375 CRC (about 0.75 cents). I had assumed that prices might be cheaper here in a rural town in Costa Rica than in Oregon, but I was wrong. Everything is priced about the same as it is back home. In addition, something to note is that while most places here accept card, there are some places that only accept cash, like my favorite candy store Dulci Mundo. For this reason, when you make withdrawals from the ATMs, make sure you get enough CRC to last you for a while, because my bank charges me a fee anytime I use an ATM here.

Something I have noticed about town is that there are men loitering *everywhere*. Many spend their time in the small central park, but there always seems to be pairs of men loitering at the corners of buildings, waiting to yell things at me when I walk by. Luckily, I still don't know enough Spanish to understand them, but it is uncomfortable nonetheless. When I have tried to eat my lunch in the overcrowded park, I have felt uncomfortable with men being too friendly, as well. I have noticed, however, that the cemetery uptown is often empty. If you are willing to walk a bit uphill and hang with the graves, I would recommend visiting the cemetery. It is a great place to eat lunch if you are a little introverted or just need a break. Not only is reading the graves an interesting way to learn Spanish, it is often very peaceful there, and has a covered area with benches. Just be careful not to interrupt any funerals. The cemetery is next to the main church in town, and I remember exiting one day to see a large number of people walking out of the church and onto the road following a slowly driving black car. They were headed to the cemetery! Luckily, I had left before they got there, but it would have been awkward if I hadn't.

One final thing to note for the town is that men here (and everywhere in CR), aside from yelling things or being overly friendly if you look feminine, will also wait for you to enter a bus or store before they enter. Men here have been socialized to be chivalrous in a way that means even if they are physically in front of you when the bus comes, all men will wait for the women to get on the bus first, before they do. The same goes for exiting or entering rooms together; the

men will wait for the women to go first, even if it is inconvenient. They will also open doors for you.

Okay, last topic, the station itself. If you go to a different station, I am not sure how much of this will apply, but the majority of this was relevant for the Las Cruces Biological Research Station in 2025. The dining hall. The food here is great! But, it may take a little getting used to if you are a picky eater. I personally do not like onions, tomatoes, or bell peppers, and I have not had a meal without at least one of these since arriving. And, there is no repeating food schedule; they prepare something new every day. In addition, though meals technically start at a certain time, there is something here called Tico Time that my supervisor explained to me after I kept showing up on time to our meetings. People here are a little late. To most things. And that is okay! It is expected. Only official meetings like church assemblies or important group gatherings start on time. Also, if your boots are muddy, it is okay to take them off before you enter places.

Finally, I am staying in the Orquidea room right now, which is very nice. However, never in my life have I had people come into my room and clean it for me, so that has taken some getting used to. The cleaning ladies came pretty often, and not in a way that I could predict, so I eventually had to ask reception if they could only come on certain days. This is working much better for me, and is something for you to consider. Last thing, everyone here uses WhatsApp for communication. *Everyone*. So, make sure you have it if you want to be able to communicate. Okay, good luck! Have a great time! Remember buspray! And sunscreen. And an umbrella. I was here in the summer, and we had rain or thunderstorms most afternoons.