

# Learning Spanish in Paradise

## Costa Rica

**Bordered by Panama and Nicaragua,** Costa Rica is a natural paradise bursting with geographical gems. With tropical forests, stunning beaches, whitewater rivers, and active volcanoes, visitors will be awestruck with all that Costa Rica has to offer. There is no doubt that every student who visits will see what Costa Rica means by its motto, “Pura Vida” which is used to express living peacefully surrounded by nature, family, and friends.

With more than four million inhabitants, Costa Rica’s official language is Spanish. However, visitors to Costa Rica may notice two accents; one is the regular Costa Rican accent, and the other is the Nicoyan accent, which has evolved due to the country’s close proximity to Nicaragua.

**Amigos de las Américas** (AMIGOS) offers the exciting opportunity for high school and college students to experience the beauty of Costa Rica while working on meaningful environmental and educational projects.

AMIGOS volunteers live and work in rural and semi-rural communities in Costa Rica. Unlike many other volunteer programs, volunteers get a full immersion experience because they are placed in a community with only one or two other English-speaking volunteers and

they stay with Spanish-speaking host families. Participants facilitate camps for local children ages 5-12 that focus on creative expression, conservation, trash collection, and nutrition. Additionally, volunteers work on community improvement projects like making trash and recycle bins, building bus stops, repairing playgrounds, and forming sports teams.

AMIGOS works in the Brunca region of Costa Rica in the district of Perez Zeledón, located in the southern part of the country. This area is dominated by coffee, pineapple, and banana plantations, and the climate in this region ranges from cool in mountainous areas to hot, humid sections near the Pacific coast. They also offer 5-8 week summer programs in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

Set in the Cordillera de Tilarán in Costa Rica’s central highlands, Monteverde is a nature-lover’s paradise. The reserve is alive with countless species of wildlife and vegetation, while organic farming and eco-tourism are booming. Here is where **Cactus Language** has been offering Spanish courses at its partner school since 1996.

All of the teachers are professional, native speakers with university training and experience in teaching Spanish as a second language. Students can choose from group lessons or individual courses depending on their

abilities and particular learning styles. Cactus also offers Spanish immersion courses in Heredia, Jacó Beach, Manuel Antonio, Playa Tamarindo, Sámara, San Joaquín de Flores, and San José in Costa Rica.

Just 20 minutes away from San José, **Central Valley Spanish School** is located in Moravia. The school’s methodology applies the “Natural Approach,” a theory for the acquisition of a second language which emphasizes the primacy of oral and conversational skills, to all levels of Spanish classes. Instruction takes place in the morning. After lunch, students can participate in a variety of activities, such as hiking, horseback riding, or whitewater rafting.

With locations in Heredia and Sámara, **Centro de Idiomas Intercultural** is a lively language school with 15 years experience of immersing students into the Costa Rican culture and the Spanish language. The school offers a series of 18 courses designed by curriculum specialists, using interactive small groups in an environment of total immersion in Latin American culture. Classes are four hours





## Christine Tsai goes tropical in her quest for the perfect Spanish immersion experience

per day, Monday through Friday, and all professors are university trained and credentialed to teach Spanish as a second language. Additionally, Latin dance and cooking classes, as well as weekly activities, are scheduled both on and off campus to keep students involved and speaking Spanish.

Located in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, is the **Costa Rican Language Academy**. Here, students will learn Spanish in the classroom, in extracurricular activities and in the homestay program. The school's Spanish immersion program also includes Latin dance classes, Costa Rican cooking classes, additional conversation practices, outside excursions, and other cultural activities.

CRLA also offers volunteer work programs which allow students to expand their language abilities and learn more about the local culture while helping local communities and increasing their knowledge in various fields. Volunteers can choose from a variety of work, including teaching children or protecting endangered sea turtles.

With locations in San José and Santa Ana, **Conversa** offers programs with a maximum of four students to ensure that each student is placed in the best group possible to maximize their progress. Students are given an oral proficiency interview and grammar test before they are placed in a group. Care is taken to

form groups that are as homogenous as possible, taking into account the age of the student as well as his or her language proficiency level. Every Friday afternoon, academic coordinators meet with the instructors and students are evaluated. The coordinators also assign a different instructor to each group for the following week and students are able to switch groups if they wish.

**CPH Language and Cross Cultural School** is run by a staff with over 50 years of combined experience in designing and implementing training to prepare foreigners to live and work throughout Latin America. CPH, which has been responsible for training Peace Corps volunteers in Latin America for over 30 years, is committed to helping each student reach the highest possible communication proficiency in Spanish. Its eclectic teaching approach integrates language skill development into cultural and work-related situations.

For those who would like to learn Spanish while experiencing the natural environment of Costa Rica, **Cultourica-Proyectos Interculturales** might be a perfect fit. The organization offers Spanish courses integrated in community-based eco-tourism and regards language learning as the key to understanding the country, its culture, and its inhabitants. Located in the Eco-Lodge El Marañón, 10 miles from the center of San José, classes

held are held outside in a bamboo pavilion, and students can stroll through the tropical gardens during their breaks.

The program, "Español on Tour" offers a two-week language tour where students can get an inside-view of Costa Rican culture and its fascinating nature. Starting in San José, participants explore the Gulf and the Peninsula of Nicoya. After a two-day stay in the rainforest, the tour goes to Sámara where classes take place in the morning with enough time to relax on the beach.

**Forester Instituto Internacional** in San José offers several exciting programs which stress oral communication. Vocabulary is related to the areas of daily life and grammatical rules are used actively so that the correct usage begins to sound right in the student's ear. Chosen among other Spanish language schools in Costa Rica by several foreign universities for their study abroad Spanish programs, Spanish lessons are provided at different levels, in small classes. For those who are unable to travel or who wish to continue improving their Spanish, the Forester Instituto Internacional also offers online, live one-to-one instruction via webcam.

**ILISA Instituto de Idiomas**, in San Pedro in Costa Rica and Panama, has offered intensive language training for demanding learners since 1987. ILISA's experienced and well-

trained teachers provide the ideal environment for a serious yet fun language learning experience. A variety of flexible programs can be tailored to the student's needs and carefully selected home-stay programs complete the Spanish-learning experience.

At the **Institute for Central American Development Studies** in San José, intensive conversation, grammar, and comprehension classes are supplemented with guest lectures, as well as discussions on politics, social conditions, environmental, and human rights issues. Developed in 1986, the school offers semester and summer internship programs, a semester field course, and intensive immersion courses. At ICADS, students will not only learn and practice Spanish, but they will be challenged to think critically about socio-economic issues currently impacting Costa Rica and the rest of Central America.

Located in the small colonial coffee town of Orosi, **Montaña Linda Language School**, offers language classes at discount rates. With housing options in camping, youth hostels, guest houses, or homestay families, the school's intensive Spanish language class packages are private lessons, structured to fit any student's Spanish language needs. Students set the direction of their classes, allowing them to study at their own pace. The surrounding areas also provide students with great leisurely activities, such as bicycle tours, horse-back riding, bird watching, swimming, and camping.

The **Natural Spanish Institute**, located in the San Ramón, "the city of poets and presidents," is an officially registered Spanish-language school that provides a personal educational experience for students interested in learning about Latin American culture as they become familiar with the Spanish language. The school teaches conversation and reading in Spanish through a combination of formal classroom work and community activities. Students live with carefully selected Costa Rican families and participate in family life as part of the program. Together with their teachers, students visit local businesses and other organizations for direct face-to-face language practice with native Costa Rican and other Latin Americans. Teachers also conduct guided visits to local sites of environmental and cultural interest. Ten percent of student's fees

are donated to environmental organizations to help conserve the unique natural environment of Costa Rica.

**Proyecto Asis**, located in the rural community of Javillos de San Carlos, serves as an animal rescue center, a volunteer center and a Spanish school. It is committed to providing quality Spanish classes while giving students the opportunity to help local rural communities in order to increase environmental conservation awareness through communication and community service. Because there are few English speakers in the community, Javillos is the perfect place for those who want a true total language immersion experience while enjoying the flora and fauna of the environment.

The **Universidad Veritas** in San José offers a variety of linguistic, cultural, and ecological adventures, including a four-week intensive Spanish and culture program where students learn Spanish grammar, conversation, and composition. Students can also take other courses in culture, international business, environmental sciences, and Spanish-taught or English-taught electives in Latin-American literature. Students may also participate in extracurricular activities on campus, such as dance lessons, martial arts, cooking classes, or conversation clubs.

Located in the **Nosara-Ostional National Reserve**, **Rey de Nosara Language School** offers both private and group courses. Serving students for 17 years, the school offers quality Spanish instruction in addition to many outdoor activities, such as scuba-diving, swimming, hiking, fishing, bird-watching, snorkeling, tennis, and dancing.

On the west coast of Costa Rica, **WAYRA Instituto de Español** is located at the beautiful Tamarindo Beach. Recognized as a D.E.L.E. examination center by the Instituto de Cervantes, it is the perfect choice for those who want to learn Spanish in a serious environment while enjoying the beaches. Spanish classes are held in beautiful spacious classrooms with a perfect view of the school's garden where sightings of iguanas and monkeys often occur.

**The Center for Cultural Interchange**, a nonprofit international exchange organization, offers language school programs in two great locations: Manuel Antonio and San José. Small classes limited to six students provide

the opportunity for everyone to learn through constant student and teacher interaction.

The locations offer diverse experiences to satisfy the interests of any participant. San José, Costa Rica's capital, is the perfect destination for city-loving language students. Rich with exciting attractions and cultural history, the city's relaxed atmosphere provides a great place to learn, surrounded by exciting adventure opportunities — the city is just a few hours from hiking in cloud forests and white water rafting. Students have the opportunity to learn salsa dancing, enjoy natural hot springs, tour a coffee plantation and visit waterfalls at La Paz and Tortuga Island.

Manuel Antonio National Park is a great option for the outdoorsy language student, as deep green forested mountains meet the turquoise waters of the Pacific. White sandy beaches and stunning wildlife truly make Manuel Antonio a tropical paradise. Students may participate in excursions including snorkeling, rainforest canopy tours, dolphin watching, and sea kayaking.

In addition to the language skills students gain within the classroom, CCI's homestay experience adds a whole new level of learning and exchange. By living within a local community, students have the opportunity to share meals, conversation and daily life with a Costa Rican family, enhancing not only their Spanish language skills but their cultural understanding.

CCI has a variety of other programs throughout Costa Rica, including volunteer programs.

## Guatemala

### Guatemala, located south of

Mexico in Central America, is the ideal place for any traveler to experience the ancient Mayan history that has been etched into the country, while witnessing the constant development and economic growth of the country.

Guatemala's documented history dates back to 10,000 B.C., and some evidence may suggest it dates back even further. Today, Guatemala has 13 million inhabitants and, while the official language is Spanish, 21 recognized Mayan languages are spoken amongst its people. One of those, Quiché, is the second most spoken language after



Spanish and some Spanish language schools will offer Quiché language courses for those who want to really delve into Guatemala's language and culture.

Guatemala is also the perfect place for anyone looking to integrate some adventure into their language studies. Whether it be climbing the ancient Mayan ruins, traversing through its jungles or national forest, exploring its mysterious volcanoes, or lazing on its Caribbean and Pacific beaches, there is something for everyone.

## Antigua

**Antigua, which is one of the world's** best preserved colonial cities, with its beautiful architecture, cobbled streets, and stunning setting amongst three volcanoes, is renowned for the friendliness of its people. **Academia de Español Sevilla** offers private lessons with professional, qualified, and experienced teachers. Students can study from four to eight hours daily, start any day of the year, and have their classes tailored to their own specific needs. Sevilla is authorized by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, and is also certified by various local universities, and recommended by the Tourism Institute of Guatemala.

Sevilla offers the choice between homestay or student house accommodation where all rooms are private. Students can also participate in cultural activities, including salsa and meringue classes, volcano hikes, and horseback or bicycle tours of the city. The school also encourages students to offer their help to the community through various volunteer projects.

Also located Antigua is **Antigua Spanish Academy** which has been established for 23 years. Authorized by the Ministry of Education of Guatemala and the Tourism Institute of Guatemala, the academy offers Spanish courses for all levels or professions. Students can also combine Spanish courses with volunteer programs at hospitals, schools, or farms. The school provides all study materials as well as activities in the afternoon, such as bike tours, Guatemalan cooking classes, coffee tours, macadamia nut farm tours, and much more.

**ENFOREX** has schools throughout Guatemala and Costa Rica, each with its own unique charm. The school in Flamingo Beach in Costa Rica is housed in a magnificent building with 25 fully equipped classrooms, a garden area, and a pool, while the school in Antigua, Guatemala is housed in a renovated colonial building, with a capacity of 80 students. All schools offer private courses, intensive courses, and super-intensive courses for students of varying levels of Spanish.

The **Spanish Academy Probigua** offers a total immersion experience consisting of private and group courses of three or four students. The program is based on conversation, grammar review, reading analysis, and activities beyond the classroom. As a non-profit organization, the school donates its profits to establish and maintain libraries in the many rural villages in which children have no access to books.

## Quetzaltenango

**Quetzaltenango, the second largest** city in Guatemala (referred to as Xela "shay-la"), was founded in 1524 by the Spanish conquistadors. It is an active city with a population made up of 50 percent mestizo and 50 percent indigenous Mayan. Located here is **Casa Xelaju**, which promotes cross-cultural understanding through its Spanish and Quiche language programs, social projects, internship program, volunteer work and travel services. As a fully accredited Spanish institute, students can earn high school and college credits.

Also located in the city is CELAS Maya, which offers private classes in Spanish as well as the Mayan languages of Quiché and Mam. In addition to classes, they offer daily activities, such as movie showings, dance and

cooking classes, and weekly conferences on various subjects concerning Guatemalan culture. CELAS Maya also often organizes weekend excursions, such as trips to archeological sites and volcanoes. Students are also able to deepen their knowledge of Spanish and experience the language in its everyday use and cultural context through their placement in Guatemalan host families.

**Escuela Juan Sisay**, surrounded by mountains and volcanoes, offers courses which enable students to speak, read, write, and participate in conversations in Spanish with an emphasis in oral proficiency supported by a strong grammatical foundation. At the same time, students will also be introduced to the social, cultural, historical, and political realities of the country. Students participate in private courses for five hours a day, five days a week. This method of instruction allows each teacher to focus all energies on one student, creating a program specifically tailored toward the needs of that student, as opposed to a general curriculum for a class.

Each week, a different teacher is in charge of running the week's extracurricular activities. Activities take place in the afternoons after classes and lunch with host families. These activities are designed to compliment the classes and include conferences, discussions, movies, hikes, and excursions.

With locations in Quetzaltenango, Jutiapa, Huehuetenango, Retalhuleu, and Guatemala City, **Instituto Guatemalteco Americano** has had 62 years of experience in offering English and Spanish language learning programs. IGA offers programs for children, teens, and adults, with a wide variety of programs and schedules, including daily and weekend sessions. It is also a major teacher training center offering a Teacher's Training Course and an annual National Teacher's Conference with the approval of Guatemala's Department of Education.

Also in the Mayan highland city of Quetzaltenango, **Miguel Angel Asturias Spanish School** offers 25 hours of intensive individual Spanish instruction, numerous activities, and homestay with all meals for \$150 per week, surrounded by volcanoes, with amazing scenery and hiking opportunities, as well as access to all parts of Guatemala by bus.

The teachers at Miguel Angel Asturias Spanish School have up to 20 years experi-

ence teaching one-on-one immersion Spanish, with rigorous training and certification. From absolute beginner level to highly advanced, each lesson is customized precisely to the student's needs. There's also an extensive library of books, videos, and multimedia that students can use in the school or check out and take home.

Numerous social and humanitarian volunteer opportunities are offered, include sustainable agriculture, photography, teaching, healthcare, agro-industrial co-operatives, rural development, counseling, and more.

Daily and weekend activities, such as visits to markets and villages, Salsa dancing, conferences and discussions with experts, cultural activities are included. There's Internet access and Skype in the school for keeping in touch. Students can also receive university credit for attendance.

The **Volunteer Spanish Academy** allows students to take Spanish language courses while volunteering five days a week at a nearby impoverished elementary school. Not only do students practice their Spanish, but they are able to witness the hardships that Guatemalan students, teachers, and families face. The program also offers wide variety of hands-on cultural activities that provide students with the opportunities to learn more about Guatemalan culture and society.

## Lake Atitlan

**Located on the beautiful Lake Atitlan** in the highlands of Guatemala, **Casa Rosario Spanish School** offers private Spanish tutorials. The tutorials take place in the cabanas located throughout the garden of the school. All teachers are experienced at teaching students by immersion regardless of the student's level of Spanish.

Also located on Lake Atitlan is **Jabel Tinamit Spanish School** in Panajachel, which is Mayan owned and operated. Students can learn Spanish in private classes or in a group. The school also offers online audio and video classes for those who would rather learn Spanish from home. When students are finished with classes for the day, they can participate in a variety of activities including eco-walks, boat trips, shopping, climbing a volcano, or exploring a Mayan cave.

## Peten

**In northern Guatemala, Peten has some** of the most breathtaking Mayan ruins of the country. Peten's **Nueva Juventud Spanish School** offers a program that includes opportunities for students to participate in volunteer activities, including reforestation projects and environmental education. Students receive 20 hours of instruction per week and have the option to volunteer in an ecological park and in a community library or local school. **X**

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