

# **Tropical Environments and Society—Field Experience at La Selva Biological Research Station, Costa Rica**

## **Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023-Sunday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

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### **Brief Program Description:**

La Selva is a world-class, 1600-hectare Costa Rican research facility comprising both old-growth and recovering tropical Caribbean humid lowland forest. Founded in 1968 by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), La Selva affords students the opportunity to experience the incredible biodiversity of a tropical rainforest environment first hand while also taking advantage of the rich history of scientific inquiry that has occurred, and continues to occur, there. Students will also see some of the environment surrounding La Selva, which encompasses a diverse and ever shifting mosaic of land use, ranging from small farms and pastures to commercial-scale monoculture of bananas and pineapples. Rutgers faculty course instructors will lead daily topical discussions and guide group and independent research activities with the aim of fostering deeper understanding of the challenges and threats to tropical ecosystems. This includes topics such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and land use transformation, as seen through the local lens of La Selva and its surroundings.

### **Learning Goals and Objectives**

1. Develop a foundation of knowledge in topics that enable appreciation and exploration of tropical environments.
2. Engage in hands-on, inquiry- and/or curiosity-driven research activities in groups and individually that provide exposure to different methodologies, approaches, or techniques.

### **Assessment and Expectations**

This program is offered in Spring 2023 as a stand-alone, 1 credit course. The breakdown of assessment is as follows:

- 25% Participation
- 40% Research Activity
- 25% Nature Journal
- 10% Reflection Piece

For the **participation** component, students are expected to attend and contribute to all topical discussions and group and individual research activities. Some short readings may be assigned prior to each topical discussion; students should be prepared to discuss these. For the **research activity** component, students are expected to prepare a short verbal and/or visual presentation on some facet of the course research projects that can be shared with other students and course instructors; further instruction will be provided

later. For the **nature journal** component, students are expected to record observations and responses to prompt questions in a written notebook. (Course instructors will provide a brief introduction to the principles and practice of nature journaling.) For the **reflection piece** component, students are expected to prepare and submit a short (~1 paragraph) summary of an experience from our visit. Such reflection pieces could also take other forms, e.g., a posting to a social media platform or work of art. Creativity is highly encouraged!

In our view, the unique aspect of our program is that we are based at a research facility: in alignment with this research-oriented foundation, we seek student participants who embrace the opportunity to ask questions about La Selva's forests and surroundings, and who are willing to work toward answering those questions. Costa Rica has countless opportunities for tourism—indeed, it is a popular destination for many spring breaking college students. Our program is not a tourism program. We will be wholly immersed in the rainforest: you will sweat, your boots will get muddy, and you may experience some bug bites, just like the scientists and researchers who work at La Selva. But hopefully you will see these as worthwhile investments for the intimate, first-hand knowledge you will gain from the experience.

### **Course Materials**

Readings for topical discussions, information about La Selva, schedules, and other relevant materials will be posted to Canvas. While La Selva has internet access, students are strongly encouraged to download written materials prior to departure. Student participants should also have a notebook.

### **Trip Logistics**

Student participants should arrange to arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica (Juan Santamaria International Airport) before noon on Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Our group will depart from the airport for La Selva via shuttle in the afternoon (the ride to La Selva is approximately 2.5 hours from the airport). We will return via shuttle to San Jose on Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023; departing flights should be arranged for Sunday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Overnight hotel accommodation for Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup> will be arranged.

More information, including an orientation on La Selva, instructions about travel, safety, and conduct, and a daily schedule of activities, will be provided during one or more virtual meetings to be scheduled for January/February 2023.

### **Academic Integrity**

As with any Rutgers course, students are expected to adhere to all elements of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy—please see: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu> for the current version of this policy as well as academic integrity resources. We want everyone to have an amazing and transformative experience, while being cognizant of the fact that we are both guests of Costa Rica and ambassadors of Rutgers.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete a registration form available from <https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration>.

Please note that La Selva has many maintained, paved trails that provide access to lodging, dining, research, and education facilities, and staff and guides have experience assisting visitors with disabilities. If you have any specific concerns, please contact one of the instructors in advance so we can make any arrangements necessary to facilitate your visit.