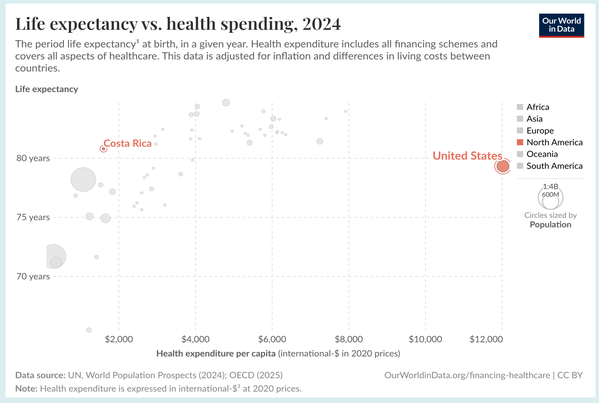
Medical Spanish Immersion in Costa Rica

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Background

Costa Rica and Its Healthcare System

- Central American country with a population of approximately 5 million people[1]
- Current constitution, adopted in 1949, granted universal suffrage, permanently abolished the army, and established various social, economic, and educational guarantees for all citizens[1]
- Estimated 2025 GDP per capita is $31,462[2]
- Spends about one-fourth of the national budget on education, which is free and compulsory, and has one of the highest literacy rates in the Western Hemisphere (>98%)[1]
- *Universal, Integrated Health System*: Costa Rica provides universal health coverage through the Caja Costarriccense de Seguro Social (CCSS), a publicly funded system that delivers comprehensive preventive and curative care, emphasizing primary and community health
- *Strong Health Outcomes:* Despite modest national income, Costa Rica achieves life expectancy (~80 years) and infant mortality rates comparable to high-income countries, largely due to robust primary care networks, vaccination programs, and social investment in education and sanitation[1,2]



1. Stansifer, C.L., Karnes, T.L., Parker, F.D., Elbow, G.S. (2025, October 20). Costa Rica. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/place/Costa-Rica
2. World Health Organization 2025 data.who.int, Costa Rica [Country overview]. (Accessed on 31 October 2025)

The IHCAI Foundation

- Non-profit organization dedicated to advancing global medical education, health research, and community health in Central America and the Caribbean
- Promotes continuous medical education, access to health information, and North-South collaboration in health research and training
- Provides clinical clerkships and medical Spanish programs for students and professionals worldwide
- Actively works to reduce health disparities and discrimination in access to care and strengthen research capacity in low- and middle-income regions
- Contact Info: info@ihcai.org

Program Overview

- Two-week advanced Medical Spanish course using small group teaching, intensive grammar review, and clinical scenarios
- Two weeks of clinical shadowing at local clinics in Grecia, a small town about 1.5 hours from San Jose
- Students stayed with host families in both San Jose and Grecia while completing the program





Personal Goals and Learning Objectives

- Improve Spanish proficiency to communicate confidently with patients and colleagues while deepening cultural understanding in clinical contexts
- Explore Costa Rica's healthcare system to understand how its primary care-driven, universal model promotes prevention and equitable access to care

Clinical Sites: EBAIS

- EBAIS (*Equipos Básicos de Atención Integral en Salud)*: Primary care teams that form the backbone of Costa Rica's public health system
- Staff: Typically includes a family physician or general doctor, nurse, medical assistant, and community health workers
- Services: Preventive care, vaccinations, chronic disease management, maternal and child health
- Community-focused care: Each team is responsible for a geographically defined population, enabling personalized care, follow-up, and strong community engagement

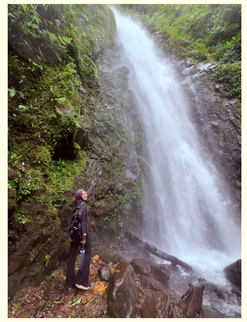



Traveling Costa Rica

Highlights include:

- Visiting the Caribbean beaches of Puerto Viejo and the Pacific coastline of the Guanacaste province
- Hiking at previous eruption sites of the Arenal Volcano and exploring the surrounding hot springs, plus the nearby town, La Fortuna
- Learning about local indigenous communities, traditional medicine, and cacao farming while touring a Bribri family's homestead
- Exploring Costa Rica's incredible natural preserves, including the Mistico Hanging Bridges, Cataratas El Tigre near Monteverde, a cloud forest, and Manuel Antonio National Park, and spotting some representatives of Costa Rica's rich biodiversity, including sloths!
- Enjoying countless delicious meals, including lunches at *sodas,* traditional Costa Rican restaurants







Conclusions

- With a growing Spanish-speaking patient population in the US, it is essential for future physicians to develop cultural sensitivity and communication skills to serve diverse communities effectively
- Costa Rica's primary-care driven, community-focused health system has a positive impact on population health
- We will apply these lessons in our future medical careers to enhance patient-centered care, preventive strategies, and health equity

Acknowledgments

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