

International Service Project to Costa Rica

In June 2019, Office of Student Life and the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement will sponsor a one-week service project in Costa Rica. The dates of travel are June 1- June 8, 2019. The trip is open to all Mount Wachusett Community College students recent graduates(2019) and students that will be returning for the fall 2019 semester and will be 18 years of age and eligible to obtain a passport by March 21, 2019.

Why Costa Rica?

A 2014 national survey conducted by the National Statistics and Census Institute revealed that the number of households living in poverty or extreme poverty in Costa Rica has increased 1.7 and 6.7% respectively. This poverty has disproportionality impacted rural areas where the extreme poverty rate is double that of urban areas which offer more opportunities for employment. 30.3% of all homes in rural Costa Rica fall below the poverty line.

Costa Rica has also suffered environmentally. At one time, nearly all of Costa Rica was covered by forest, but deforestation for agricultural purposes and cattle ranching has decimated the land with only 25% of the total area of Costa Rica now covered in virgin forest. This deforestation was most aggressive in the 1990s when the country lost an average of 3% of its forests annually. The results are devastating to the environment and the natural habitat. As a results of this deforestation there has been widespread soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, as well as contamination of existing soil by aggressive pesticides and fertilizers utilized in an attempt to revitalize the land. Crops such as bananas, sugarcane and coffee have suffered as have those who depend on these crops to provide income. Deforestation and pollution have also lead to the endangerment of birds, fish and other animals as well as other plant life.

Costa Rica is a country that is in need of service and is in need of economic revitalization. This opportunity through MWCC and *True Nature Education* will provide both. Through a mix of animal and environmentally related service, tourism, and service with the local communities, MWCC students will have the opportunity to make an impact in Costa Rica while becoming true global citizens.

The Host Organization

True Nature Education (<http://truenatureeducation.com/abroad/>) is our host organization. Their non-profit division is the Creer Service Organization. Trips coordinated through Creer have a holistic approach inclusive of service side-by-side with local people, the opportunity to explore local culture, various activities such as a dolphin experience or snorkeling, as well as geotourism. Geotourism is defined as a best practice form of tourism which sustains and enhances the character of a place such as culture, heritage, and well-being of local residents and of course the local environment. This organization was chosen after an extensive screening process because it provides the safest, most affordable and most comprehensive service and cultural experience to its participants.

The Project

True Nature Education has worked closely with MWCC to plan an educational and exciting travel opportunity. Participants will travel to three separate destinations throughout their stay. A sample itinerary (subject to change) is as follows:

June 1 –Depart from Logan International Airport (Boston) arrive in Costa Rica, welcome dinner

June 2 – orientation and service at organic farm at hotel; travel to Manuel Antonio

June 3 – animal sanctuary service project

June 4 – beach restoration service project; beach activities; national park tour

June 5 – morning snorkel boat tour; depart for second destination (Luna Nueva Eco-Lodge);

June 6 – San Rafael service project; bio-dynamic farm tour; nighttime hike;

June 7 – service project with local schools; zipline/horseback; closing reflection, travel to airport hotel

June 8 – travel to Logan International Airport (Boston)

Application Information and Registration Fee

There will be nine student (9) spaces available for the trip. Two chaperones from MWCC will accompany students: Shelley Errington Nicholson (Director of Community Learning), and Greg Clement (Associate Dean of Students).

For those interested in applying, the completed application is due no later than Tuesday, October 19, 2018 at 4:00pm in the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement. Applications are also available on line at the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement website <http://mwcc.edu/democracy/>. Applications may be submitted online or printed copies can be picked up at the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement. There are two parts to the application including an essay. Both must be submitted by the deadline of October 19, 2018. in order for your application to be considered. Incomplete or partial applications will not be considered. Candidates will be called in for an in-person interview sometime the week of October 22nd. Selected participants will be notified by Friday, October 26th.

By Monday, October 29th those who are selected to participate in the trip will need to confirm their attendance by submitting a **non-refundable** deposit in the amount of \$350 to True Nature Education (instructions will be provided) and 150.00 **non-refundable** airfare deposit. Participants are also responsible for paying an additional **\$925 by December 1, 2018** to secure their spot. Each participant must raise an additional **\$925** per person through personal fundraising efforts. All participants are **required** to assist with extensive fundraising activities

because we do not want cost to be a prohibiting factor. All fundraising must be completed by **February 1, 2019**.

Budget breakdown:

Total Cost: \$2400 per student

These fees will cover the flight to Costa Rica, transportation while at the site, housing, and all meals. Participants are encouraged to receive the proper vaccinations and medications needed to travel to Costa Rica, the cost of these immunizations can range from \$100-\$200 per person (usually covered by insurance) and are not included in the program cost. Part of the trip planning will include an information session on health issues. A small amount of personal spending money should be taken for souvenirs and optional activities. Travel insurance is built into the cost of the program.

Accommodations

The group will be flying into Alajuela, Costa Rica where a representative from the site will meet us at the airport. While in Costa Rica the group will be staying at three different hotels, Partner Hotel, Hotel Karache in Manuel Antonio and the Luna Nueva Eco-Lodge. Fresh, clean, safe drinking water will be available at all times. All food is prepared with U.S. stomachs in mind and will be safe to eat. Food allergies and other concerns such as vegetarian or gluten free will be accommodated whenever possible as long as they are communicated to the site in advance of the trip.

Expectations and Requirements of Volunteers

Participants are expected to exhibit sensitivity to the host culture. As learning is a primary goal of the International Service Project, participants will prepare for the trip by completing reading packets, attending orientation meetings, and participating in a pre-service activity. In addition, participants are expected to facilitate and participate in reflections about the service and activities. Prior to the trip, all members of the group are expected to participate in all fundraising activities. All participants must be covered by a travel/health insurance plan, which includes emergency medical evacuation. It is the individual's responsibility to obtain a passport and any necessary visas. After being advised of the health risks associated with travel, the participant is responsible for making decisions regarding appropriate health precautions.

Those selected for the trip will automatically become members of the new MWCC Cultural Engagement and International Service Club and as such will be expected to participate in club related activities and projects including a pre-service project with a local community agency to be conducted in the spring.

All participants must attend a series of **mandatory** meetings leading up to the trip. Topics such as safety, fundraising, Costa Rican culture, poverty and the importance of service.

Safety

While in Costa Rica, it is imperative that all students follow the safety guidelines put forth by the College. These guidelines are based on Consular Reports and information from the United States and Costa Rican governments. The following are some of the precautions being taken:

- a.) Travel alone will not be permitted;
- b.) Travel at night and on dark, unsafe roads will not be permitted;
- c.) Travel will only be conducted with the whole group, a tour guide, a driver, and private transportation; and
- d.) While in Costa Rica students will abide by all rules established by the MWCC staff.

Mount Wachusett Community College places great importance on the safety of the participants during the trip and therefore takes numerous precautions to ensure a successful trip. The following are some of the precautions being taken:

- a.) Participants will be registered with the American Embassy in Costa Rica;
- b.) Lodgings at both sites are secure and located in safe areas; and
- c.) Consular and Travel Safety Reports will be reviewed and evaluated constantly.

Prior to the trip, there will be several meetings to address issues of safety, including personal property such as valuables and passports, appropriate dress, and culturally appropriate behavior that will alleviate drawing attention to oneself. When in another country, you are often surrendering many of the rights and freedoms that United States citizens take for granted. This should be kept in mind at all times during the trip.

The site has an emergency evacuation plan in place, for individuals and/or the entire group. In addition, our host site will have a phone with international calling capabilities in case of an emergency. Please note that Wi-Fi and cellular service may be anywhere from unreliable to non-existent depending on our specific location during the trip. Please let those at home know you may be out of touch for the entire trip and not to be concerned if they do not hear from you.

Application Process

Applications will be reviewed by a committee comprised of MWCC faculty and staff. In addition, this committee will be conducting half hour interviews with candidates who meet the minimum qualifications. Please note students who are selected for participation in the International Service Project to Costa Rica must remain in good standing with MWCC up to and throughout the duration of the trip. International Service Project Coordinators retain the right to decline participants who do not demonstrate necessary qualifications and requirements for the trip.

If you have any questions about the above information or about the application process, please contact Shelley Errington Nicholson at mnicholson5@mwcc.mass.edu or 978-632-9219 (room 152) for assistance.



MWCC International Service Trip 2019 Application

Demographic and Personal Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Phone: _____

Area of Study: _____

Student ID#: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Students who do not achieve the age of 18 years by May 20, 2019 are not eligible for participation in this activity!

Are you eligible for a U.S. passport? (You can check here: <http://www.dhs.gov/how-do-i/apply-us-passport>)

- Yes
- No **(If no, you are not eligible to apply!)**

Language:

Native Language Fluency: _____

Other Languages Spoken: _____

Have you ever traveled outside of the U.S.?

- Yes
- No

If yes, where and when?

The following questions can be answered LEGIBLY in the space provided below, or you can attach a separate paper – if you do so, please make sure your name is on the paper.

Please use the space below to list your previous and current volunteer activities – this includes MWCC related and non-MWCC related service and volunteerism, as well as MWCC and community club and organization participation.

What do you personally want to get out of an international service experience?

How will an international service experience compliment your academic studies and future career plans?

Why this particular opportunity and why now?

Please provide at least three fundraising ideas below:

1.
2.
3.

Traveling internationally with a group of people can be stressful. How do you handle stress?
What do you do when you feel you are becoming overly stressed or overwhelmed?

Finally, what are you most nervous about in terms of this trip?

Anything else that you would like to tell us?

By signing this application, the applicant acknowledges that they are responsible for their own health insurance, immunizations and other travel precautions should they be selected to participate in the international service project.

Student Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____