

# VERTO HOUSING IN COSTA RICA

Welcome to your home away from home! Whether you chose to live in a homestay or the student residence, read on for information about what to expect in your accommodations.

## The Student Residence

Your student residence is a large two-story building that is similar to a dormitory. Keep in mind the campus was built in the 1970's, so the buildings are a bit older! Bedrooms, living areas, and kitchens will be different sizes and shapes from residence to residence – even within the same building. The key thing to remember is that living environments in another country may be quite different from what you're used to.

Student residences typically have:

- Upwards of 15-20 rooms
- Shared rooms that accommodate 2-4 students, with a single bathroom
- Bunk beds
- Common areas such as living room & kitchen
- Common laundry room

Given that you'll be in the tropics, expect to experience high humidity during the day. Bedrooms are equipped with fans to keep the space cool.

Rest assured that all participants will have the same amenities, with advantages to living in each area and building. Please note that you will likely have less personal and storage space than you may be accustomed to at home.

Because Verto participants are not the only inhabitants on campus, it is important to be mindful of your neighbors and other residents. You're expected to be respectful of noise levels, trash, cleaning up after yourself, etc. You'll find yourself amongst students, researchers, and visitors from all over the world at the CATIE campus.

## Where are the residences located?

Verto Costa Rica partners with CATIE, an agricultural-focused graduate school. Located on a sprawling campus with lush green space everywhere, you'll find that it's similar to a university campus.

The campus is well-equipped for students' daily lives. You'll dine at the cafeteria, which provides all meals for students. There is an ATM and a bank on campus, as well as a small convenience store, souvenir shop, and a restaurant.

Verto runs a shuttle from campus to the town of Turrialba with several daily departures and returns. The town of Turrialba has everything you need if you can't find it on campus, and is 10 minutes away by shuttle. You will find supermarkets, pharmacies, clinics, and a hospital.

## Is my housing location safe?

Verto chooses residences based on the highest standards of health and safety. The Verto Costa Rica residences are on the CATIE campus, which is a private campus with 24/7 security and controlled entry and exit of vehicles and people.

The town of Turrialba, where the campus is located, is known to be safe and student-friendly. There may be aspects that surprise students though (depending on their hometown). For example, the homeless population of Turrialba often sleep in the center of town (not on or near campus) and may beg passers-by for money or food. The homeless population presence does not mean that the area is unsafe or unpleasant.

Throughout your experience, you are expected to follow basic safety best practices such as locking your bedroom door and keeping your keys safe.

## What will be different in my dorms that I might not expect?

**LAUNDRY ROOMS.** You are responsible for doing and paying for your laundry. In the residences there are laundry rooms equipped with washers and dryers. You must bring your own detergent, fabric softener, or anything else you need. We encourage you to purchase this upon your arrival.

**MOLD.** Costa Rican buildings are more likely than U.S. buildings to accumulate mold on the interior of windows and walls. This isn't due to poor cleanliness; it is due to older buildings with less ventilation and strong humidity. To avoid mold growth, you should crack the windows after a shower. Any mold growth can easily be wiped away, and the housing provider's weekly cleaning will help prevent this.

**WILD ANIMALS:** Being surrounded by forests, rivers, and a lake, the campus has its own microclimate, which creates a perfect combination in the tropics for animal life to thrive. When walking around campus you may encounter coatis, squirrels, or caimans on the lake. These animals are generally harmless. Keep all food in the refrigerator and away from your room. Always keep the doors of the residence and your room closed.

You will also come across insects including mosquitoes, so use repellent.

Additionally, it is rare to see snakes, but it is possible. Be aware of where you step at night and always carry a flashlight and wear closed toe shoes. If you have any concerns, seek help from our on-site campus staff or your Student Life Coordinator.

**AIR CONDITIONING.** The bedrooms in the dorms do not have air conditioning and neither do most homes in Costa Rica. That can mean some hot sunny days and less ventilation than you might be used to. The rooms come with a fan, but if you would like more ventilation, there are inexpensive fans that you can buy at nearby home supply stores.

**CAFETERIA:** The campus has a cafeteria that will provide food for our students. The schedules will be provided during Verto Discovery Week (your first week abroad). It is important to inform the Verto staff in advance of your food preferences and allergies via your Health History Form. You will also have access to a few kitchens in the residences that are equipped with refrigerators and microwaves. There are no stoves available for our students.

**GOING TO TOWN:** The main entrance of the CATIE campus has access to a main street, where public buses pass constantly and can take you to the town. However, Verto shuttles are scheduled every day between the campus and Turrialba. Another option would be taxis and Uber. For longer trips, there are buses that run between Turrialba and San Jose (the capital) and the Verto team can give you more information on public transportation.

**SHOWERS:** In Costa Rica, most showers have some visible wires, however, it is not dangerous and the electricity is isolated. No need to be scared, this type of shower is very common in Costa Rican houses.

**MICE.** If you keep food items out or don't clean up after yourselves, particularly with crumbs or an overflowing trash can, you will likely see a tiny mouse friend scutter through your dorm or in the kitchen. Mice find their way into the cracks of old buildings especially when the weather is changing and they are looking for a new home. They will happily stay in your room if they have a food source – so keep things tidy! The maintenance team can help should you have any mice visitors, just remember it can take some time to tell the entire mouse community that your room is not an open house for mice!

**WATER:** Tap water is drinkable on campus, though it may not be in some other areas of Costa Rica so be sure to ask the Verto staff before drinking elsewhere.

**RAIN:** Living in Costa Rica can be very challenging at times due to the weather which switches between dry and rainy. It could be a sunny morning but a very rainy afternoon. Be sure to pack waterproof clothing and shoes that protect you from water and cold.

**Although it may take some getting used to, your residence will feel like home before you know it!**

*Please see below for example photos of what housing may look like. Note that these photos are general and do not represent the exact room you will personally be assigned. Additionally, the photos may give the impression of a larger space than reality due to a wide-angle lens.*







# Homestays

## Why choose a homestay?

You will have the unique experience of living with a local family. Homestays are a fantastic opportunity to gain insight into the authentic Turrialbeño lifestyle.

Some of the benefits of a Verto Costa Rica homestay include:

- **Cultural immersion**, by getting out of your comfort zone and learning about another way of life.
- **Daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner**, helping you spend less on groceries and meals.
- **Independence**, since many host families will be busy with their day-to-day life.
- **A more mature environment**, which could be a good fit for students who feel their religious beliefs or cultural background might clash with typical aspects of university dorm culture.
- **An easier transition** for students who haven't travelled or lived independently before, since you will have food prepared for you and be surrounded by friendly hosts who know the area well.

Every participants' experience will be unique and depend on the effort of both the hosts and the student. Many students become good friends with their host families and stay in touch with them afterwards. Costa Rican homestay families are friendly and eager to share about themselves and learn about you. But like anything, you will get out what you put in!

## What can you expect at your homestay?

**A safe and comfortable home:** All hosts are vetted by our homestay provider first and then by our Verto Housing Coordinator for the highest standards of health and safety. You can expect to be provided with basics including a bedroom, a bathroom (likely shared), Wi-Fi throughout the home, bed linens, towels, weekly cleaning of the bedroom, and laundry.

**An adjustment period:** Sharing a house with new people can seem daunting when you first arrive, and you will need to be flexible to ensure you get along. Please remember that communication is the key to a successful homestay experience. Be sure to discuss the rules of the house with your family and keep them informed of your plans, when you will be away, etc. If you are unsure of anything, just ask.

**Diverse host families:** Many students expect to live with a young couple that has no children. Though this is sometimes the case, Verto accepts families of all forms and backgrounds, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, background, origin, or religion. Your host family could be a single mother or an older couple with dogs. They could have children and/or pets, or none of them. Whatever the make-up of your host family is, we are confident that all students and families chosen will be able to respect one another's differences and learn from each other.

**Differing meal cultures:** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included in your homestay, though it may look different depending on the host. Many families have breakfast and dinner together as a way to share space with one another, while other hosts prefer to eat independently.

**Differing accommodations:** Homestay houses vary widely. Students will have a single or a shared (with another Verto participant) room, but will likely share a bathroom with other family members. Many families

live in a one-floor house that may or may not have a small terrace, corridor, or backyard. Turrialba is a small rural town and your dwellings might be smaller in size than the ones you are accustomed to back home.

## Where are the homestays located?

Homestay locations will depend on the number of students in your cohort, as well as what is available to us from the homestay provider. Hosts tend to live in neighborhoods close to the town center, typically 10 to 15 minutes walking from the central park. This means that your commute into Verto Study Center shouldn't take more than 40 minutes via a combination of walking and bus/shuttle.

## Is my housing location safe?

Verto works with a homestay provider to choose hosts based on the highest standards of health and safety.

Homestay neighborhoods are known to be generally safe and student-friendly. There may be aspects that surprise students though, depending on their hometown. For example, the homeless population of Turrialba often sleep in the center of town and may beg passers-by for money or food. The homeless population presence does not mean that the area is unsafe or unpleasant.

Throughout your experience, you are expected to follow basic safety best practices both while you are out on the streets of Turrialba, and also within your homestay. It is your responsibility to ensure that you lock the doors and windows of your homestay, and that no one can gain access to your home without a key. Never leave doors propped open. If anyone asks to gain access to your home, ask them for identification. Do not let people in under the assumption that they are maintenance workers or housekeeping staff - be sure to check with your host family first.

## What if something in my room/home breaks?

Don't worry! Please inform your homestay family. The homestay provider has an amazing maintenance team that will help out with whatever needs to be fixed.

If you accidentally caused the damage, it's no problem, however, you will be expected to cover the expense and will be provided a receipt after the contractor fixes the damage. If the problem wasn't caused by you, there will be no charge to you.

## What to look forward to:

You will be taking in your surroundings not as a tourist, but as a local, fully immersing yourself in the *Turrialbeño* lifestyle. With locals for neighbors, commuting to and from class, grocery shopping at local grocery stores, and walking more than you've walked in a while, you will soon see exactly what it means to be living in the beautiful, lush green mountain town of Turrialba.

The best advice we can give is to come with an open mind.



## We look forward to helping you settle in!

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