Costa Rica is a beautiful country in Central America with a small land area of 51.1 thousand square km and a population of 4.7 million people. Costa Rica, which means “rich coast”, is the number one country in the region to protect its rich bio-diversity with a quarter of its territory preserved in national parks and biological reserves. With one of the most stable economies and political systems in Central America, Costa Rica is the second country in the world without an army. In this country, the benefits from the coffee trade, bananas, pineapple and tourism are invested in environmental conservation, public education, and public health.

According to the annual survey Happy Planet Index (HPI), conducted by the New Economics Foundation in 2012, Costa Rica tops the HPI Index for the second time. It is scored by measuring the experienced well-being and the life expectancy of the population, in contrast to its ecological footprint for future generations. Costa Rica is famous for being one of the most biologically rich spots in the world. Though it occupies less than 0.01 percent of the planet’s landmass, the tiny nation is home to 5 percent of all species! Also, the country has pursued an aggressive agenda to protect this diversity. The government has set aside 25 percent of its land for conservation, which means it is closing in on an important milestone under its treaty obligations in the 1993 U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity.

The experienced well-being of Costa Ricans (also known as “ticos”) is about expressing their belief of a good life that is perceived in the country in general. With a good economy, tropical weather all year round (72°F) with only rainy and summer seasons, beautiful mountains, beaches, and landscapes, Costa Rica represents a good quality of living.

The Ticos are very proud of living in a peaceful country and this peaceful way of life is also observed in the fact that the military army was abolished for good in 1949. Only local police guards are the security of its habitants. In general, Costa Rica has lived in peace with its neighboring countries and in most cases has brought to the table of negotiation any possible conflicts to promote peace. Carefree state of mind is the way that Ticos are, and the phrase to describe this is PURA VIDA (PURE LIFE!). However, it is more than just enjoying a pure life; it describes the behavior among the people, a code for life if you want to call it that way. Pura Vida is used for many situations as in greeting people or expressing: “I am fine”, “everything is going to be fine” or “thank you”. The “Tico time hour” is another concept, where the people do not expect punctuality. It is acceptable to arrive 15-30 minutes late. Costa Ricans usually adapt to everything and try to figure out a way to solve situations that may affect them, and if they can’t then they will make jokes about it.

The economy has mainly been agricultural based. Since 1820, the most important exported products have been coffee, bananas, and pineapple. However, in the last 15 years it has become an Industrial Zone, as other U.S. call centers and survey companies have brought to the country a good source of income and employment. But the most important activity today is the tourist industry. It has created jobs and micro enterprises with food supply and hospitality services, hotels, restaurants, real state, rent-a-car companies, and more since the late 80’s.

The investment in public education as helped Costa Rica to have one of the most elevated literacy education rates (98.7% female and 97.9% male between 15-24 years of age), according to UNICEF. The children all over the country can attend public school financial with governmental funds. Even Costa Rica has four world renowned public universities with free tuition cost for domestic students and exchange programs for international students in institutions all over the world. English language instruction is offered in most public schools and universities although not at a very high level. But, if students can afford private education, they can become fully bilingual with English – Spanish by the age of 14.

Lastly, another important fact of this beautiful country and people is the creation of Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social (CCSS) on November 1, 1941.

This provided public health services, allowing free health services and medicine to all citizens and foreigners that require medical treatments. CCSS hospitals and services were extended across the nation after its creation, and although private medical services always provides better customer service, this public healthcare system enriches many populations at risk. Many countries have wanted to imitate this solidary practice and have come to study its function and services provided.

Let’s take a trip to this beautiful country to see its beaches, mountains, volcanos and national parks. Walk in the “Mercado Central” in San Jose, the country’s capital, where most of the cheapest handicrafted art is sold. Come discover the warm culture and friendly people, and immerse yourself in their hospitality. A lifetime experience awaits you in Costa Rica.
Located in Gilchrist Hall within the University of Northern Iowa Office of Admissions, the Office of International Admissions is dedicated to recruiting, serving, and processing applications and inquiries from undergraduate and graduate international students (interested in) studying at UNI. The process begins when Kristi Marchesani, Assistant Director of International Admissions, travels to different schools and fairs around the globe to visit with prospective students.

After meeting with Kristi, prospective students fill out an application for UNI, and wait for a response from International Record Analysts Bryant Dowd (Undergraduate International Record Analyst) and Linda Jernigan (Graduate International Record Analyst). In their response, Bryant and Linda inform applicants about the application process and the documents that are needed in order to have a completed application.

“The application starts the whole process rolling,” says Linda “after we receive the application, I tell them about the next steps they need to take, and how to complete their application.”

The Office of International Admissions tries to help make the application process as easy as possible for students.

“We have really tried to make the process more international student friendly. With more development technology-wise, we can do more outreach, and we can provide more information online. As far as some of our admissions policies, we try to be very fair and give our students lots of options. We have to understand that we’re dealing with students from many parts of the world, so we’ve really tried to learn more about the circumstances in those countries and adapt our admissions standard so that its still supporting what the university needs and wants but is considering the situation in that country,” says Kristi.

After receiving all of the necessary documents, Bryant and Linda spend time researching and analyzing them to make sure the prospective student has fulfilled all the requirements to be considered for admission to UNI. After they ascertain that the application is complete, the application is sent to the specific academic department the student has applied to, who then makes the admissions decision.
In just five years at CIEP, Sally Roos has made lasting impact on both the students and the CIEP. She attended UNI, graduating in 2009 with a Bachelors degree in Communications Studies and a minor in Journalism. Sally became interested in learning about other cultures and meeting international students after she was required to do a service project in her Introduction to Communication Studies class. Sally decided to become a conversation partner. She also had a college roommate that encouraged her to get to know international students and invite them to her home over breaks. Those experiences guided her decision to work with international students. During her senior year of college, Sally was offered internship with the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier in a position with the CIEP. Ultimately, Sally chose the position at the CIEP and has not looked back since.

While Sally has had multiple international travel experiences in Mexico, Indonesia, Japan, and Taiwan starting from a young age, her most advantageous teaching experience in South Korea. In 2009, Sally journeyed off to South Korea where she taught English to Korean children of all ages. While she was there, Sally lived with a host family. Five out of seven days a week, Sally was with only Korean-speaking people. The language barrier and the culture differences were very difficult, but Sally and her host family were able to overcome these differences and make a compromise. Sally found a church service that was given in English and she attended that every weekend. At these services, Sally met other Americans and began to do things with them on the weekends. Sally stated, “It really put me in the same perspective of our students here. I think it helped me to see why they need to spend time with people from their own countries, and how hard it can be.” At the beginning, the main concern for Sally was to figure out how to manage a classroom. It was not until after the first months, that Sally saw progress in the students.
Intercultural Communication students formed a social bridge to the campus community for South Koreans studying English and Stem Education in CIEP this January. Dr. Victoria DeFrancisco’s section of Communication Studies upperclassman served as temporary conversation partners for Kyungpook National University students during their short 4-week stay at UNI.

The project benefited both groups, providing a real-life intercultural communication opportunity for UNI students and a conversational English opportunity for KNU students.

“It is one thing for students to read about how to build intercultural relationships in a textbook, it is quite another to actually try to apply what they read,” said Dr. DeFrancisco, Professor of Communication Studies. “The conversation partner program makes the text (and the course) come alive.”

UNI Senior, Monica Sodergren, took the course as a requirement for a Conflict Resolution Certificate from the Social Work Department. She found out that she had more in common with her conversation partner, Seoyoung Yoon, than she would have thought.

“The class prepared me for being open to new experiences and appreciating differences instead of being annoyed with them,” she said.

According to DeFrancisco, some of her students from small towns understand that college is a good opportunity for them to interact with people from different countries. The personal and academic benefit of meeting with CIEP students depends on how much time and effort they make to volunteer.

“For those students who put in the time, the experience was very fulfilling and they said it opened their eyes not only to another culture, but to the unique qualities of their own culture,” she said.

On Martin Luther King Day, the students were first introduced to one another over hot cocoa and structured conversational activities facilitated by Dr. DeFrancisco and Sally Roos, the CIEP Activities Coordinator. Smiles and laughter filled the UNI Wesley Foundation as both groups of students shared something unique about themselves, posed for pictures with their new partners, looked for common interests, and discussed cultural differences. Future meetings between partners were decided upon individually. Conversation Partner pairs went to movies and restaurants, attended CIEP events together, or just met in the student union or in the dormitories.

“When I was with my conversation partner, I could only speak English, and that made my language skills better,” said KNU student, Jooyeon Lee. UNI Communication Major, Karlee West, surprised Lee, a city girl, with her story about her big backyard and turkey hunting during Thanksgiving.

“And also, Karlee listened to me very carefully, and she try to understand when I was speaking to her and also she spoke in slow, and clear language to help me understand well.”

Keeping up in a conversation with native or fluent conversation partners is a challenge for many students studying in the CIEP, and the KNU students felt the same. However, working through the challenge benefits both the learner and the volunteer.
Meet Tasleem! She is a current CIEP student who arrived here in January from Qatif, Saudi Arabia. She is passionate about traveling, drawing, animals, and learning new languages. She is the only one of her siblings to have studied abroad, but she says that her family was very supportive of her decision. When asked if she was afraid to leave her country, family and friends, Tasleem said she was a little sad, but not afraid at all. She had been waiting for this chance since she was sixteen! Before coming here, Tasleem had a cat, turtle, lizard, bird, snake, iguana, a dog, and fish. Besides leaving her family and friends, she also had to give each of her pets away so that she could come to study. However, she is not regretful of her decision at all.

"I have become more outgoing since coming to the United States, and I have met many people. When I talk to my mom at home I tell her that the people here are really nice. I have also improved my English skills in speaking and writing grammar."

One aspect of CIEP that she really enjoys is her diverse group of classmates.

"In class I listen to the other students tell stories about their home culture and I also get to share my opinion on topics as well."

She also mentioned that she really likes how her teachers spend time making sure they understand the material, instead of just memorizing information. CIEP has helped Tasleem continue learning English so that she may to travel to other English-speaking countries in the future. So far, she has had the opportunity to travel around the United States, visiting Florida and Chicago, taking in all that each place has to offer. Tasleem has also spent time getting to know Americans through the Conversation Partner Program, through CIEP activities, and by spending time with her Host Family. A favorite memory of hers is celebrating Valentine’s Day with her host family by making cookies and playing with the kids. She also enjoyed the trip to Salvation Army when she had the opportunity to play soccer with the kids there.

Although she has only been here a short time, Tasleem has grown tremendously in her English abilities and in her overall cultural awareness. She still talks to her mom at home in Saudi Arabia daily, but is excited for what the future offers her as well. She hopes to study at another university to experience another part of the country. She plans to become an Electrical or Mechanical Engineer so that she can make enough money to support her travel bug and continue exploring all that the world has to offer!
For four weeks during Spring Term 1, a group of STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) pedagogy students from Kyungpook National University in South Korea attended English classes taught by program assistants Ashley Jennings, Carol Floyd, and Christina Tsimpides and teaching assistant Kate Hein. These instructors created lessons that allowed students to improve, regardless of their proficiency level.

In the reading class, Kate Hein put students in control of their learning by assigning high-interest STEM-related articles and allowing student groups to generate their own vocabulary lists and questions. She used these student-generated materials to guide her instruction, and she found that students enjoyed working in small groups and being able to help each other with the assignments.

Ashley Jennings taught listening/speaking, focusing on presentation skills, conversation strategies, and debates. When asked to describe the best part of her experience with the KNU class, Jennings explained a speed dating activity her class completed:

“I divided the class into 2 groups and had them form 2 circles, with the outside and inside circles facing each other. Then, I told them that no matter the topic, the inside circle would need to disagree with the topic (and give arguments for opposing it) and the outside circle would need to support the topic and provide reasons. They got SO into it!”

Christina Tsimpides and Carol Floyd taught writing and grammar. The culminating project for this class was a three-page formal research paper. In addition to intensive writing instruction, this class also addressed perfect tenses, noun clauses, and passive voice. The grammar portion of the class was interactive and engaging for students. Tsimpides explains that she used interactive Powerpoint presentations and grammar games, such as “passive voice jeopardy, in which students had to answer trivia questions about UNI/American culture using the passive voice.”

Notably, UNI faculty also contributed to the success of the program by delivering and preparing materials for 2 hour sessions discussing STEM Pedagogy with the group. These staff members included: Jihaw Noh (Associate Professor, Mathematics), John Ophus (Associate Professor, Biology), Jeffrey Morgan (Associate Professor, Physics), and Scott Greenhalgh (Assistant Professor, Technology).
Trip to Amana Colonies
On Saturday, January 25th students went on a day trip to the Historic Amana Colonies for the annual Winterfest Celebration. Students were able to eat a delicious German meal, participate in traditional German winter games, visit the local shops, and end the day with shopping at Coralridge Mall in Coralville.

Ping Pong Tournament
Students gathered for a fun night of pizza and competition as classmates and friends participated in a Ping-Pong tournament, complete with prizes for the winner.

Valentine’s Day Culture Hour
A few days prior to Valentine’s Day, CIEP students and UNI students got together to enjoy an afternoon of sweet treats and discussion of dating and relationship customs and traditions in the United States.

Waterloo Blackhawks Game
Students traveled to Young Arena in Waterloo to watch an exciting game of hockey between the Waterloo Blackhawks and the Muskegon Lumberjacks from Michigan.

Off-Campus Culture Talk: History of Waterloo
Students traveled to nearby Waterloo to visit the Grout Museum District and learn about the evolution of a small town into a Midwest industrial center.

International Food Potluck
On a Saturday evening, CIEP students brought food from their home countries to a potluck to share with their classmates, as well as several conversation partners and host families. Dishes from around the world were enjoyed by all!
In 2007, Isabel Garcia moved with her family from the big city of Madrid, Spain to a small college town in Iowa when her husband had been relocated by John Deere & Company, an international engineering and tractor manufacturing company that employs many in the Cedar Valley area.

The adjustment process to life in Cedar Falls, Iowa was not easy.

“It was a bunch of mix feelings…” said Isabel. “…missing home and open for new adventures in a completely different type of community and city size.”

Isabel’s husband found the Culture and Intensive English Program at the University of Northern Iowa as a place for her to continue learning and developing. With a degree in Journalism and further studies in political science, Isabel was already well-educated in many topics, but CIEP was a different kind of educational opportunity that interested her. She was particularly interested in the practical uses that English training afforded her.

“I was able to actually learn and practice English in many different environments… from class to fun!” she said.

She joined a slang class and learned how to talk like others around campus.

In addition to coursework, Isabel had two conversation partners during her time at UNI. One of her partners, Sally Roos, went on to work in CIEP after serving as a volunteer. Good friends are some of Isabel’s favorite memories at UNI.

“Both Sally and Molly are two great friends that I miss. I remember all their good thinking about journalism and culture. I still keep contact with them through Facebook and email.”

Although a wife and mom, Isabel also made time for CIEP activities and especially enjoyed international food potlucks.

“Yes, I enjoyed as many student outings as possible,” she said. “Good memories of the dinners with food from all around the world!”

After graduating from CIEP, Isabel was enrolled in communication studies at UNI. She had the opportunity to take coursework at the graduate level which provided her with a background in public relations and cross cultural communication. The program was a great match for her career and personal interest.

Since her time in the CIEP, Isabel moved to Germany for a few years due to another John Deere transfer and back home to Madrid with her very close-knit family of five. Staying busy, she currently works as an executive coach for a company called Seeliger & Conde Consultancy, which provides services such as strategic consulting for professional development and talent management. The company provides services to many local and international clients.

“I have too many hobbies but little time to enjoy them,” she said. “Now, with three kids and a full time job, my spare time is so little that I am very selective in what I do. Mainly, I practice horsebackriding and hiking.”

Isabel is proud of the diversity of her country, Spain, which has many different foods, cultures and people. Spain has four official languages: Castilian, Catalan, Galician, Basque, and Valencian.

While the Western lifestyle of the U.S. was not too different from Spain, Isabel called U.S. the most convenient place she has lived. She also misses some of the food she ate in Cedar Falls, including soups from Panera Bread, BBQ ribs from Famous Dave’s, and hamburgers from Texas Roadhouse.

Isabel encourages current and future CIEP students to: “Enjoy every single minute there at full speed!”