

Booking a Flight & The Airport Experience

This step-by-guide spells out everything you'll need to know about the flying experience – from booking your flight to navigating the airport and getting situated onto the plane.

Arrival Dates & Information

- **Your official arrival date is Monday, January 23rd.** Verto will provide transportation to your accommodation from the airport during a 9:00am - 8:00pm (local time) window.
- **If you decide to arrive before the official arrival date,** you are responsible for your accommodation until the start date, and for your transportation to campus on January 23rd. Your program accommodation will not be available before the official start date.
- **You must arrive on January 23rd at the latest.** If you are taking an overnight flight, be sure that it arrives ON January 23rd (as opposed to leaving on January 23rd and arriving the following morning on the 24th).
- Many overnight flights arrive early in the morning, around 6am. If your flight arrives before the pickup window time, you will need to wait a few hours for the shuttles to start running.
- **Before departure you must share your flight information with Verto.** You will be prompted to input this information in your Student Portal closer to departure:
 - The date your last flight leaves for and arrives in Costa Rica
 - Your airline and flight number
 - Your time of departure and arrival of your last flight

How to Search for & Book Your Flight

To book a flight, most people purchase their tickets online through airline or travel sites or through mobile apps. This is a relatively simple process, but you may want to put in some time and care into comparing flight costs and durations to find the best option for you.

Searching on Google Flights

A great way to see your different flight options for a given date is to use Google Flights. Go to <https://www.google.com/travel/flights> and then input your start and end destinations and your ideal departure date.

On Google Flights, you'll be able to compare and contrast different flight options. You can see how long the flight will take, how much it costs, and whether or not luggage is included in the price. If you see a flight that looks ideal, you can click on it and it will show you different options for how to book it – either through the airline's website directly, or on travel sites that sometimes provide better deals. Generally speaking, we recommend booking on the airline's website directly– more details on that below.

Searching with Online Travel Agencies

Online Travel Agencies or OTA's are very similar to Google Flights but the difference is that instead of just showing you flight options like Google Flight does, they usually provide a way for you to book the flight directly on that website. These agencies are sometimes able to provide deals that may be cheaper than

booking directly with the airlines. These are sites such as Orbitz, Trivago, Kayak, Booking.com, Expedia, and others.

There are not too many differences between the sites, but it can be helpful to search around for the best deal, although Google Flights tends to be a good one-stop-shop for searching.

In addition to discounts, a benefit of booking on well-known platforms is that if problems arise on your trip, a customer service representative may be available to help you out. However, as we'll discuss below, it could be better to book directly with the airline to avoid having to go through a middle-man.

Searching with an In-Person / Private Travel Agency

Sometimes people prefer to book with a travel agency, where a real person will be able to find flights and present the options to you. There are some instances where booking through a travel agency is the better option. For example, if you are planning to have multiple stops or have a travel itinerary for before or after your semester ends.

Booking Your Flight Directly with an Airline

Some people are loyal to one or a few specific airlines, and may choose to search directly on the airline's website. This is also helpful if you have "points," "miles," or other types of benefits with one airline.

Whether you find the flight on the airline's website, or via google flights, it is generally ideal to book the flight directly on the airline's website. When you book directly with the airline, it can be easier to get better seats or change your seats and address flight delays, changes, or cancellations, etc. Otherwise, you might be referred back to your travel agency, which is an extra step that can cause challenges and delays.

Pro-Tip: If your flight includes a meal and you have dietary restrictions, you need to convey that to your airline asap. You can do so by logging in online or by calling the airline.

Tips for Choosing Your Flight

Try to Fly Direct

Whenever possible, get a direct flight. A direct flight means that you will only take one plane from your start point to your destination, rather than having to stop on the way and switch to another plane. Direct flights may cost more, but can be worthwhile. You want the journey to be as simple as possible and layovers can add extra hiccups with issues like delays, cancellations, and missed connecting flights. If direct is not available, it's no big deal though!

Connecting Flights & Layovers

Again, no worries if you do need to have a connecting flight / layover. This means that you will need to get off the plane at one airport to get on a new plane and go to your final destination.

Sometimes long flights have multiple connections. If possible, we recommend limiting it to only one connection.

Layover length can vary from 30 minutes to several hours, depending on the flight schedules. We recommend that your layover is at least 2 hours to ensure you have plenty of time to deboard your original plane, pass through security/immigration if needed, and get to your next flight.

Consider Whether You Prefer to Fly Overnight

Overnight flights are often cheaper but also mean that you may not get a solid night's rest since you'll be on the plane all night. Some people prefer to take these flights because they'd rather try to sleep than have to entertain themselves on a day flight. Other people don't want to risk not getting good sleep, so try to plan what will work best for you.

Look at the Type of Ticket

You may see different ticket types available for purchase. The main differences you're likely to see include the ability to make flight adjustments after purchase, refundability, carry on allowance, seat selection, or boarding group. Make sure you're aware of the limitations and benefits, and read the fine print of the ticket you are purchasing.

Check Baggage Inclusions

Some flights/airlines include carry-on and checked baggage in the cost of the ticket, and others do not. Carry-on and checked baggage can be quite costly, so make sure you understand whether or not this is included, and if not, how much each piece of baggage will cost.

Packing for Your Flight

General Packing Tips

Always start packing the week before! Make your list in advance in case you need to purchase anything and get your laundry done a few days before so that it's ready to go.

The night before your flight, make sure all of your electronics are fully charged. Make sure you have your passport, ID, wallet, tickets, and documents in your bag.

You will receive a packing list from Verto closer to the start date.

Types of Luggage

With airlines, there are 2 types of luggage, carry-on and checked luggage.

Carry-on luggage refers to the suitcase or bag that you can bring on the plane with you and store in the overhead compartment. Airlines typically have specific weight and size limitations for these pieces of luggage, along with limitations about what it can and cannot contain due to security rules.

You can usually only bring one carry-on plus a "personal item" which would be a small-medium purse or backpack that can fit under the seat in front of you.

Checked luggage is the larger suitcase or bag that you give to the airline before you pass security, that they load under the plane in a place that will not be accessible to you during your flight and until you reach baggage claim at your destination. There are also size and weight limitations for these bags, although they are allowed to be much larger than carry-ons. Your checked bag is weighed by airline staff and if your bags are overweight, you will have to pay a fee.

Luggage Tips

- **Be sure to pack anything you'll need, or anything extremely important to you, in your carry-on.** As mentioned, you will not be able to access checked bags until you arrive at baggage claim at your final destination. As such, you should pack anything that you will need for your flight day(s) in your carry-on bag, including snacks, headphones, a book, electronics, chargers, documents, medicines, self-care items, etc.
 - We recommend coming prepared with ways to keep yourself entertained in general and especially when there is not wifi. You may want to bring a book or download videos and podcasts onto your phone/computer. Drawing supplies and games can be good options as well.
 - Additional travel must-haves to ensure a comfortable trip include an eye-mask, ear-plugs, a sweatshirt, socks, and a neck pillow. You may also want to bring chapstick, eye drops, and a small lotion since planes can be very dry.
 - If you're budget conscious, we recommend bringing your snacks and any meals with you from home since airport food can be very expensive.
- **Keep in mind that it is always possible for a checked bag to get lost or delayed.** We recommend bringing anything that is expensive or very important to you in your carry-on bag. You also want to have all of your medication in your carry-on bag and a change of clothes just in case.
- **Be aware of what is NOT allowed in your carry-on.** There are strict rules about what you cannot bring in a carry-on, especially when it comes to the amount of liquids you can bring. Most airlines allow you to fill one quart sized ziploc bag with bottles that each have a max of 3.4 ounces of liquid. There may be other rules too, and sometimes there are restrictions for checked bags as well, so read up on your airlines website and the TSA website before packing your bag.
- **Check all restrictions about size and weight limits prior to packing your bags.** You may have to pay extra if your carry-on or checked baggage goes over weight or size limitations. Check with your airline before packing.
- **If possible, purchase your luggage online prior to checking in.** It is often cheaper to purchase luggage when you purchase your ticket, or online, than it is in-person at the airport.
- **If you have a layover, confirm the route of your checked baggage.** In most cases, the checked baggage will be processed automatically from the airline onto your next flight, but you should check with airline staff just in case. (Ask them if you need to pick up your checked bag in the layover location and re-check it in, or if you will just pick it up at baggage claim in your final destination).

Documents to Pack

You must bring all necessary documents with you in your carry-on. These documents include:

- Your passport
 - Make sure your passport is valid for 6 months after the program end date. If it is not, you need to contact your Onboarding Advisor ASAP.
- Your flight tickets

- Some airlines require you to print these out, whereas others allow a screenshot on your phone. We recommend you prepare both just in case. If you have an iPhone, you can also add the tickets to your phone wallet.
- Your Panama bus ticket as proof of onward travel (Verto will provide this closer to your start date)
- Your ID and wallet
- Your destination address written down

Pro Tip: Add your airline's phone number to your contacts and jot down important info like flight numbers, confirmation numbers, etc. in the notes app on your phone and on a piece of paper.

The Airport Experience

Leaving for the Airport

Arrive at the airport around 3-4 hours before your international flight to consider time for possible traffic, busy season delays, check-in, and security lines.

Checking In

Before your flight, you are required to "check-in," which just acknowledges you are still planning to make the trip. Many airlines allow you to check-in online.

Online Check-In: When you check-in, you'll receive your boarding pass, which is your ticket that contains information about your trip. Print this out and screenshot this on your phone or add it to your digital wallet. We highly recommend printing this in case your phone dies or has any other issue.

Airport Check-In: If you don't check in online, you can check in at the airport, either at a digital kiosk or in person at the airline front desk.

Checking Luggage

If you plan on checking luggage, you can do that from a kiosk or at the airline's front desk.

If you do it at a kiosk, oftentimes you will receive a small receipt-like ticket or sticker for your bag. Keep this in a safe place. This is your proof that the bag is yours in case you need to collect it from the airline.

Pro Tip: Be sure to remove any stickers on your suitcase after you have landed at your destination. Having multiple labels on your luggage can increase chances of it getting lost.

Getting Through Security

After you check-in and drop off your bag, the airport staff will direct you towards security. If you're not sure which way your security checkpoint is, just ask. All passengers must go through security.

When you reach the front of the security line you will likely see a conveyor belt and a bunch of trays. Depending on the airport, you may need to put your laptop and electronics in their own tray. You may also need to remove your shoes and put them in a tray. You should remove your bag of liquids, your sweatshirt, and anything from your pockets and place them in a tray. Remember that you cannot bring more than a 3.4 ounce bottle of liquid, so if you have a water bottle or beverage, now is the time to drink it or throw it out. Then you will place your carry-on and backpack/purse onto the conveyor belt to be scanned in the x-ray machine.

After you have placed your items on the conveyor belt, you will be prompted to walk through the body scanner. Keep in mind that the body scanner will not show your body shape underneath your clothing, it will only show any foreign objects. As such, be sure to remove anything from your pockets ahead of time.

It is possible that you may be selected for a pat-down. You do have the right to request that the pat-down or removal be conducted by a person of your gender and in a private area if that's your preference.

After you pass through, you will collect your belongings and put your shoes back on. Make sure you have all of your belongings with you before you head to your gate area.

Finding Your Gate

Gates are located in "terminals" which means a main building or section of the airport. In large airports, it can take a while to get to a different terminal.

Your ticket should have your gate number on it but may not always. You should always **check the screens of the airport**. Look for your flight number and airline and see what gate it departs from.

Boarding the Plane

Your ticket will likely say what time boarding starts, which is typically about 45 minutes before the actual flight time. Passengers board the plane according to the group number on their ticket.

Once you reach the front of the line and the representative scans your ticket, you'll make your way onto the plane. Check your ticket to see your seat number. You will put any carry-on baggage in the overhead compartment above your seat, or as close to your seat as is available. You can take your backpack, purse, or whatever your personal item is with you to your seat. It will need to be placed under the seat in front of you for takeoff and landing.

Your Flight & Arrival

Now for the fun part, the flying itself.

After everyone boards the plane, the crew will relay safety instructions, or they will be presented on a video screen.

When it's time to takeoff, the flight attendants will check that your seatbelt is on, your tray table is up, your seat is upright, and that your personal item is under the chair in front of you. You may notice that your ears pop when the plane gets higher in the air. Sometimes chewing gum can help with this.

During the flight, you can look at the seatbelt light symbol to know if you can remove your seatbelt. At that point, you are free to walk around the plane and use the restrooms. The crew may also serve snacks and drinks. Depending on the flight, food and drink may be complimentary or you may have to purchase them.

If there is turbulence and moving around is not safe, the crew will instruct you to stay seated with your seatbelt on. Turbulence is nothing to fear—it is caused by fluctuating air pressures and is a normal experience of flying. If you're feeling nervous, try to listen to some music or distract yourself.

When the plane lands, you will be required to follow the same steps as for take-off. This may feel bumpy as well and you may want to chew gum to help your ears acclimate.

After landing, you will be instructed to stay seated until the seatbelt sign is off. Then you will wait to collect your bag from the overhead compartment and exit the plane. Make sure you have all of your belongings, especially your passport, documents, and electronics. You might have to wait on the plane for some time before you are allowed to deboard.

Wishing you a wonderful flight! Check out the “Arriving to Costa Rica” document to learn more about passing through immigration and baggage claim upon arrival.