



**Cloud Forest School**  
Monteverde  
Costa Rica

Dear International families and students,

This may be the beginning of a wonderful, fulfilling, exciting, and challenging adventure! As you consider living abroad for a year or two, you may choose to become an essential part of a vision. It's a vision of child-centered, creative education. It's a vision of opening children's hearts and minds to caring for our environment. It's a vision of teachers, administrators, volunteers and parents joining together, creating a supportive community of educators that can make a difference in a child's life. Thank you for your interest in the Cloud Forest School.

We look forward to working with you and supporting you in any way we can.

Karen Gordon  
Admissions Director

## Cloud Forest School Vision and Mission

**Our mission** is to nurture generations of ecologically aware, academically well-rounded, bilingual individuals. We will work to provide students with the knowledge, values and skills needed to make environmentally and socially conscious decisions on a local, national and global scale.

**Our vision** is of a sustainable future for the Earth through educating individuals to love, respect and protect the natural environment, to strive for justice and peace as well as academic excellence and to work towards conserving biodiversity and enriching community life.

### **Our objectives are:**

- To discover and address the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of each child in order to stimulate their creativity, natural love for learning, and sense of wonder about the world around them.
- To provide a strong interdisciplinary curriculum that incorporates environmental education in every way possible.
- To inspire and educate students to be caring, develop a strong sense of community and take an active interest in conservation and sustainability with a desire to contribute from local to global levels

### **Our commitment is to:**

- Provide well qualified staff and volunteers who model mutual respect and have the ability and desire to involve students in the maintenance of a rich and nurturing learning environment.
- Incorporate progressive teaching methodology using programs, techniques, and materials that promote child centered learning.
- Remain flexible, keeping class-size small with each child learning at his/her own pace and in his/her own manner. Teachers will select materials and structure learning activities that support and extend students' active, hands-on learning.
- Develop student proficiency in English and Spanish, giving them experiences that help them to understand other cultures and gain a perspective of local and global inter-dependence.
- Ensure that the fully integrated environmental education curriculum focuses on major ecological concepts and connects these processes to the daily lives of the students and their community.
- Provide a holistic program which includes the arts, physical education and vocational studies.
- Involve students in all aspects of caring for the CFS property by engaging them in the decision-making and practice of land stewardship through study, work, play, reflection and relaxation.
- Ensure that the CFS works against discrimination in terms of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political preference, economic status, or national, ethnic or social origin.
- Raise funds to guarantee the availability of scholarships and the optimal operation of the school as a non-profit organization.
- Provide educational opportunities for as many children and youth as possible while still maintaining the CFS mission and objectives.
- Share our resources and offer activities and workshops with other schools and organizations, in order to promote the mission of our school.



## Child Centered Education at the Cloud Forest School

Child-centered education is developmental, hands-on, and relevant to children. The learning environment is organized to meet the emotional, academic, and physical needs of each child.

Fundamentals of Child Centered Education include:

- Children learn by doing. Projects and hands-on experiences are essential.
- Helping children learn to think is as important as teaching any specific subject matter.
- Learning occurs in ways unique to each child.
- Children's curiosity and initiative are integral to their education.
- Independence is a vital part of every child's development.
- Working with others enhances children's growth in every domain.
- Every person is a thinker, creator, and contributor.
- The natural world is a place to learn. Childhood should be fun, and children should find joy in learning.
- The term "child-directed" is also important at the CFS. It describes a classroom where children have a lot of authentic say in what goes on in the classroom, such as making rules, deciding policy in class meetings, and effecting curriculum decisions, either directly through voting or indirectly by the teacher "listening" and being aware of students needs and interests.

Examples of child-centered and child-directed education at the CFS:

- Multi-level teaching through grouping
- Giving space for students to express their emotions
- Using conflict resolution strategies (peace table)
- Class Meetings
- Flexibility to change a class activity based on the needs or interests of the students
- Constructivist mathematics, students develop mathematics strategies
- Guided Reading and Literature Groups
- Child generated project ideas
- Allowing personal stories and experiences to shape understanding of a text
- Drawing upon the students themselves to create meaning when exploring new concepts
- Students are encouraged, and expected, to speak, write, and share with respect to their own experiences.
- Students learn to compare new ideas in relation to themselves and their experiences
- Students form caring, nurturing relationships with their teachers
- Classroom activities accommodate a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences
- Students work cooperatively in small groups
- Students are given choices
- Classes take advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities
- Instruction can be individualized to meet a student's special needs



## More about the Cloud Forest School

### Campus

Our 106 acre campus is a mosaic of virgin cloud forest, pristine forest and pasture land slated for reforestation. Our lower school includes clusters of buildings: preschool and kindergarten; the first and second grade; third grade and fourth grade; fifth and sixth grade; and the administrative office and computer lab. Located beyond the soccer field is the *colegio*, or upper school, campus. Various buildings house the *colegio*. There is a small library located on the lower school campus.

### Students and their Families

In its fifteen year history, the CFS has grown from 30 students to a current enrollment of over 225 in preschool through eleventh grade. Approximately 94% of the students are Costa Rican and 6% are from visiting international families and high school exchange students. The CFS welcomes students from the local and world community regardless of race, religion, national origin, ethnicity or economic status.

Because Monteverde is a rural but tourist area, most of our students' parents work as manual laborers and farmers, or as taxi drivers, cleaning staff and restaurant workers. Most of them have a sixth grade education (the last required year of schooling in Costa Rica) and for many, the total family income falls around \$500 a month.

### Financial Aid Program

We have a financial aid program that awarded more than \$150,000 in financial assistance to students during 2008-2009 school year. Financial aid is given based on financial need only – not on student performance, parent participation or sibling preference.

During matriculation all local families are eligible to submit applications for financial aid. The financial aid committee, comprised of community members, board members and the director, compile the information and then create a chart for awards based upon the amount the school has to offer in any given year. This chart is based on number of family members and monthly income from all sources – employment, rental properties, homestay volunteers etc. Parents are then informed of the financial assistance for which they qualify. Close to 75% of all Cloud Forest School students receive some type of financial assistance.

Some of our students are sponsored by *patrocinios*, people who have taken personal interest in a particular student. *Patrocinios* are often past teachers, volunteers, or visiting international families, although some are global community members who have asked the Cloud Forest School to apply a yearly tuition gift to a needy child. *Patrocinios* usually fund “blocks” of a student’s education; for example, the yearly tuition from grades 1-6, or from 7-11. While it is a long-term commitment, there is also a long-term reward in knowing that a deserving child has his or her education secured. *Patrocinios* receive a student report each semester and enjoy

hearing from the sponsored child at least once or twice per academic year.

### Budget and Funding

The total operating budget for the Cloud Forest School is about \$575,000 for the 2008-9 school year. Eighty percent of the budget is dedicated to staff salary and transportation of the students to the school. Building needs and special programs are not included in this limited budget.

Approximately half of our operating budget is raised through private fundraising. A majority of this funding comes from former volunteers, staff, school parents and visitors from North America. We have a full-time development coordinator on staff that writes grant proposals, coordinates local fundraisers, and provides communication to the greater world about our unique school.

### Volunteer, Internship and Group Programs

The CFS hosts an impressive volunteer, intern, and visiting group program. The young, young-at-heart and school groups from around the world gather on our campus throughout the school year to help with our land stewardship program, participate in service learning, or receive credits as they work as teaching assistants in our classrooms. Just as our visiting families, our interns and volunteers are an important part of our school community, and add incredible diversity, new perspective, gifts and talents to our local children's lives. The CFS has a full time program coordinator to oversee these groups.

### International Studies Program

The Cloud Forest School has long welcomed visiting international families and high school exchange students to our campus in the clouds. Our visiting students provide wonderful diversity to our campus and are excellent English language models for our local students. Our visiting parents have helped the CFS move forward by leaps and bounds as they share their expertise, gifts, and skills with our organization. From carpentry to fundraising, from dance to computers, our visiting families provide our school with immeasurable gifts.

To date, our high school exchange students have hailed both from Europe and the United States for either a semester or a whole calendar year. These adventurous young people live with one of our local CFS families. Our exchange students find that their world view expands exponentially not only as they learn a new language, but as they live immersed within an authentic Costa Rican family unit. Many of our semester-long exchange students have wanted to stay on for a whole school year – and some do just that!

The Cloud Forest School is proud to partner with a variety of independent schools in the United States which offer a small, select group of our high school students the opportunity to study abroad in the United States for a semester or a whole school year. Some of our students live with families abroad; others live on campus at boarding schools. The grand majority of our students have never owned a passport, traveled outside of the country, and especially have never traveled on an airplane! Our students who do study abroad are extremely successful - even though they are completely immersed in English language courses, most make honor roll within their first quarter.



## The Cloud Forest School's Role in Forest Conservation and Habitat Protection

Located in the Tilarán mountains, the CFS is situated in one of the world's most beautiful and diverse ecosystems. In 1992, the land was leased to the CFS on a buy-back basis by the Nature Conservancy, under a precedent-setting international agreement that built a conservation easement into the deed, permanently protecting the property's virgin cloud forest of unsurpassed beauty and biological diversity. The CFS' land extends from 1,430 m to 1,700 m in altitude. The two principal types of forest on the property are known as Pacific slope premontane wet forest and lower montane wet forest (a type of cloud forest), both of which are endangered habitat types in Costa Rica. The school's regenerating areas and other regions extending up to 1470 m are located on what was originally premontane wet forest. Above 1470 m, there is both pristine and regenerating lower montane wet forest.

In 2005, the CFS was accepted for membership in the Costa Rican Network of Private Reserves, joining the Monteverde Conservation League and other well known local non-governmental organizations that promote conservation efforts connected with their privately owned protected reserves; it is the only school in this group. It is important to note that the vast majority of protected land in the Monteverde zone is privately held and managed.

It is well known that the Monteverde zone includes a great diversity of vegetation and wildlife. Haber and others have identified more than 3,000 species of plants, including 180 types of ferns and 400 types of orchids. Many of these species grow in precise ecological conditions, which vary across life zones in the Monteverde region. In addition, some species may be seen in several life zones. These biologists note that more research is needed to better understand how ecological conditions explain the disjunctive distribution of various species (Haber and others 2000, 16).

A diverse population of wildlife depends on the forest surrounding the school. Frequently observed birds include the resplendent quetzal, three-wattled bellbird, blue-crowned motmot, keel-billed toucan and numerous species of hummingbirds. White-faced and howler monkeys, peccaries, puma, coati mundis, and agoutis also live in this forest. Biologist George Powell, a founder of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve in 1972, has noted the importance of forest fragments outside the preserve for the survival of altitudinally migrating birds, especially resplendent quetzals. His radio-telemetry studies (1989-1991) of resplendent quetzals and their seasonal altitudinal migrations outside their protected breeding areas in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve noted that neighboring land, including the CFS, "is very important to the conservation of the quetzals because it is situated adjacent to the Monteverde Preserve, but at a lower elevation which is heavily utilized by migrating quetzals." In addition, Powell and Guindon surveyed Lauraceae trees on the CFS property and recorded more than 15 tree species important for quetzals (Guindon 1996). Another notable migratory species, the American Swallow Tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*; called *Elanio Tijereta* in Costa Rica), breeds in the life zones where CFS is located. It is most frequently seen in the zone where CFS buildings are located, and is common in higher Monteverde zones (Fogden 1993).

While much of the CFS's land is pristine forest, about 25 acres are still grassland, planted for use as pasture land by prior owners of the property. While over time, this land may return to secondary forest, the school has decided to kick-start the process, as studies have shown that not only are the grasses thick and do not allow for growth of other species, but that the soil has been degraded from the years as pasture as the vegetation has been exposed to wind and sun. By strategically establishing diverse forest corridors,

through nurturing small plots of trees, the diverse ecology of the forest (ferns and shrubs and other understory) will return more quickly, re-establishing itself through filling between the trees. Secondary forests are important sources for studying succession and restoration in process. In addition, secondary forests are usually very diverse and allow for microhabitats for wildlife.

### **Environmental Education**

The CFS's land offers opportunities for our students to observe, study and learn to appreciate their local flora and fauna; to become knowledgeable about ecosystem dynamics, natural resources, land use options, sustainable living and the preservation of biodiversity. The National Wildlife Federation designated the school as the first Schoolyard Habitat in Central America.

Staff, students and volunteers are currently reforesting the areas of the CFS' land that were previously clear-cut for pastureland and have planted more than 8,000 trees during the past seven years. In addition, the campus includes:

- Greenhouse and germination beds
- Native plant gardens and nursery
- Organic vegetable gardens
- Recycling center
- Forest and mountain trail system
- Worm composting house
- Biodiesel processing shed for the school buses

Donations are used to germinate and grow tree saplings of more than 15 species of cloud forest trees for the reforestation program. The youngest children of the school collect seeds in the forest for the reforestation efforts.

The school's environmental education program rests on a three-pronged environmental education philosophy:

- Nature appreciation:* experience of the forest through play, art, creative writing and other creative expression
- Land stewardship:* time each week to collect seeds, monitor streams or weather, cultivate gardens, or plant saplings
- Curriculum integration:* using nature, the outdoors and the forests to explain and study concepts in all areas, including science and math.



## A Day at the Cloud Forest School

Our school day is 8 a.m. – 3 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 8 a.m. – 12:15 pm on Fridays. Preschool and Kindergarten attend classes half-days all week, 8a.m. – 12 noon. Most students arrive on campus at 7:45 a.m. via one of our school buses, which have scheduled pick-up times around the community starting at 7:15 a.m.

As in most of Costa Rica, Cloud Forest School students wear a uniform. However, unlike the public schools, our uniform consists of a simple t-shirt or polo shirt. Elementary school students may wear long pants, short, or skirts, and high school students wear long pants.

School wide, there is snack, recess, and lunch time scheduled throughout the day. Our nutrition plan includes bringing healthy snacks and lunches on campus that do not create waste. Banana bread, rice pudding, apples with peanut butter, cheese and crackers, and popcorn are favorite snack items and leftovers from dinner or sandwiches are excellent lunch choices. Our students eat a LOT because they are so active throughout the day! Any food that is not eaten is composted and used in our organic vegetable garden.

Students spend their time with their classmates studying their core courses, and also spend time in the field during environmental education, land stewardship, and art classes. Students of mixed grades in the elementary school interact at recess in the playground, on the basketball courts, or on the ever-favorite soccer field. It is not unusual to see children climbing our fruit trees for a treat and playing hide and seek in the forest. However, it IS quite unusual for a student to come home “clean” on any given day!

Our high school, called *colegio*, includes students in grades 7-11. Students move throughout their day in grade-level groups during core class time, and then participate in electives in mixed-grade groupings. Break and lunch are favorite times to socialize, listen to music, or play soccer.

At any given moment, on any given day, one may walk around campus and see students working in the greenhouse, hiking in the forest, receiving extra tutoring, studying for a social studies exam, learning Spanish, giving presentations, volunteering in other classrooms, helping with maintenance projects, etc. We are a busy campus, educating 225+ students from ages 3 to 18!

Classes end at 2:45, Mondays through Thursdays, and at noon on Fridays.



## Academics at the Cloud Forest School

When asked about academics at the Cloud Forest School, the first thing we always talk about is our highly dedicated and gifted faculty. Comprised of local Costa Ricans and native English speakers, our teachers are certified to teach at their grade and subject level, and many hold advanced degrees. Some of our teachers have been at the CFS since its inception; many others will stay for 1-3 years.

Our preschool and kindergarten programs are led by two classroom teachers each – one a native Spanish speaker, the other English. As early as 3 ½, our local students begin to ease their way into the bilingual world – and our visiting students do as well! From 8a.m. – 12 noon, M-F, our *kinder/prepa* students learn by doing, singing, dancing, reading, playing, problem solving, gardening, hiking, cooking...all in two languages.

Our elementary school, or *escuela*, program includes grades 1-6. All elementary teachers are native English speakers (although most are bilingual) and the majority of instruction during the school day is exclusively in English. The teachers work in coordination on grade-level teams (1/2, 3/4, 5/6) as they move through six, six-week thematic units of the school year. Elementary schedules include math, reading groups, writer's workshop, thematic studies including social studies and science, outdoor and environmental education time, PE and art. All *escuela* students receive at least one hour of Spanish instruction a day from a Costa Rican teacher. In the case of visiting students, they attend our Spanish as a Second Language Program during their classmates' instructional Spanish hour.

High school is also known as *colegio* in Costa Rica, and includes grades 7 – 11. About half of our *colegio* faculty is Spanish speaking, the other half is English. Our students receive English language arts, math, and science in English. Spanish language arts, social studies, and civics are taught in Spanish. Other curricular courses, such as art, physical education, environmental education, land stewardship, drama, etc. may be taught in either English or Spanish. Our visiting *colegio* students spend a fair amount of time in the Spanish as a Second Language program during the first semester so that they are able to participate more fully in the Spanish language courses during the second semester. Some of our visiting students choose to volunteer in classrooms or do other service projects on campus during what might be Civics time, for example.

Many visitors ask specifically about our English and math curricula, as their home schools place a high importance on those two content areas. It stands to reason that school-wide, our **English program** may not be as challenging as a visitor's home school. As 94% of our students are English language learners, we strive to provide them with a rigorous but reasonable curriculum where they will develop academically-proficient English skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the academic level of English of our students can fall from at- to 2 years below "grade level" in the United States.

Our **math program** in grades 1-4 uses a constructivist math philosophy, which is based upon the pedagogy that students should understand numbers and number theory before they move on to "doing" standard algorithms. We use the *Investigations* curriculum in grades 1-4. Students in grades 5-6 have shown that they truly comprehend math concepts as they begin to learn algorithms and other ways to work with numbers. An average visiting elementary student, depending upon the grade, may find our math program to be slightly easy or right at grade-level. A visiting high school student may find our math

curriculum to be right at grade-level or more challenging.

Our **science program** in grades 1- 6 is experiential and firmly grounded in place-based education. Through thematic units, students will explore topics such as Respecting Living Things, Mammals, Matter and Energy, Atmosphere and Weather. We are happy to provide you with a list of our thematic units at the elementary school level. In the *colegio*, our students study chemistry, physics, general biology and advanced biology. As you can imagine, there is no better place to study biology than on a 106 acre campus of cloud forest!!

Our visiting students typically study **Spanish** in our progressive Spanish as a Second Language program. With native speaking teachers who are specially certified to teach Spanish to non-native speakers, our program works with students one-on-one and in small groups to develop vocabulary and grammar skills, cultivate confidence in speaking and practice with listening comprehension. Our teachers also work at developmentally and academically appropriate levels in teaching reading and writing skills. Most elementary and high school students will spend their entire year enrolled in our SLL program. However, as our high school students move along the continuum of Spanish language proficiency, they may be able to move their way into other Spanish-language classes in our *colegio*, such as Civics and Social Studies.

In grades 1-6, visiting students will get a taste of **Social Studies** in their SSL program as they learn about Costa Rican culture as they learn the language. Some grades will also move through social studies based thematic units during the academic year, such as My Neighborhood, My Town and Mapmaking. At the *colegio* level, social studies is taught completely in Spanish. Depending upon their proficiency level upon entering the CFS, a student will either spend extra time in the SSL program during their normal social studies hour in order to augment their language abilities or will enter the class right away. In the past, parents of visiting U.S. high school students have organized a once or twice a week study session of U.S. history in their homes so that their children do not fall behind in that area. Some students have also used the social studies hour to work independently on their home social studies curriculum, if they need that course for academic credit.

Our admissions office is glad to provide interested families with copies of our grade-level curricula upon request, and will work with student's parents and home school guidance counselors to consider placement in the appropriate grade level, taking into account academic levels and social needs.



## Monteverde Life

The Cloud Forest School is located in the beautiful Tilarán Mountains of Costa Rica at the doorstep of the world renowned Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve and the Children's Eternal Rainforest. This area was first settled in the late 1930's and 40's by pioneering Costa Rican families. In the early 50's a group Quakers arrived, named the area Monteverde, took the initial step toward cloud forest conservation and began dairy farming as a means of livelihood.

In recent years, the growth of eco-tourism has provided economic alternatives, and fewer local people are making a living from dairy farming. The area is still relatively rural and the majority of the roads are unpaved. Many people do not have cars; however, walking, motorcycles, taxis and the local bus are the most common forms of transportation. There is a daily bus service to the seaport town of Puntarenas (3 hours away) and to the capital city of San José (4 to 5 hours away).

Many people find Monteverde a dynamic and interesting place in which to live and work. The diverse cultural mixture of local Costa Ricans with ex-patriate Europeans and North and South Americans adds flavor to daily life and lingo. Visiting community members enjoy participating in classes at the yoga center, singing in the community choir, playing or listening to live music in local cafes, volunteering for the various conservation organizations in town, exploring the weekly farmers market, taking or offering dance, ceramics or language classes. Many visitors have left their home countries so they can "de-schedule" their lives, and there is plenty of opportunity and space to hang out in a hammock, hike on trails, enjoy baking homemade bread, taking the online class you've always wanted to take, etc. Monteverde life is what you make of it.

### **Climate**

Sweaters, raincoats/ponchos and rubber boots are a must for anyone living in this mountaintop town. The dry season runs from February to May. The rainy season, which runs from June to October, can vary from sunny mornings with downpours in the afternoons to "temporales," which are storms that bring drizzle and rain continuously for several days (these rarely happen more than two to three times a year). Our transition season is November – January, which showcases windy, misty cool spring weather. Temperatures vary from 55 F on a cold night (wind chill can make it feel colder) to 80 F on a hot day.

### **Mail**

Mail arrives in Santa Elena several times a week, and airmail takes about two weeks to travel to or from North America.

### **Stores**

The grocery stores in Santa Elena and Monteverde are usually well stocked and bring in fresh fruits and vegetables and basic foods. Other businesses and services located in Santa Elena include hardware stores, general and farm supply stores, a vegetable and fruit store, stationery stores, small clothing shops, laundry and coffee shops, banks, health clinic, veterinarians, dentists, and many tourist shops that organize tours. The 3 kilometers from Monteverde to Santa Elena take about 30-45 minutes to walk. The Cloud Forest School is located about halfway between the two, in a section of the town called Cerro Plano.

**Religion**

There are a variety of religious groups in the area. The Catholic Church is the largest. Other groups include Quakers, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witness.



### Considering Joining the Cloud Forest School Family

The adventure begins right when you start thinking about moving your family to a new country. What might a new culture, a new language, and a new land have in store for you? The list of questions can seem daunting and never-ending! At the Cloud Forest School, we recognize the genuine importance of a “right fit” – we encourage prospective visiting families to consider if Monteverde is the right place for them, as well as if the Cloud Forest School is the right place for their children.

At this point in your research via the World Wide Web, word-of-mouth, and direct communications with people and organizations in Monteverde, you have probably learned that this is a “hotspot” on the world map when it comes to ecology and conservation. Our diverse community reflects the diversity in our forests, and short-term and long-term visitors are drawn to this island in the clouds for a variety of purposes. Some families who thought they would be here for a year are still here six years later! Others who have returned to their home countries have found that their lives have changed for the better after a year or two “on the mountain.” Monteverde is truly an amazing place to live for many people.

That said, it is important to note that Monteverde is a small town in a developing nation and is not right for everyone. Things move slowly here, and simply are not as efficient as they would be at home. Electricity does go out, so do internet connections - sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for longer! Roofs can leak, clothes always seem a little “damp” in the rainy season, favorite food items mysteriously disappear from grocery store shelves for months at a time, and very few “convenience” foods are available. The cultural work of forming genuine relationships with local Costa Ricans can take time and definitely requires an uncommon level of patience, understanding and humility on the part of visitors. When we asked a group of visiting families about characteristics that have helped them feel successful here, the following are a list of common denominators. As families, they:

- Enjoy the outdoors and living in a more open-air environment
- Have experience living or traveling in other developing nations
- Are hardy by nature – are not squeamish about insects, mold, etc.
- Have a truly flexible attitude towards life in general, especially new situations
- Are not tied to expectations, able and willing to adjust to a new reality
- Posses an adventurous spirit – both children and adults
- Are genuinely curious and intrigued by new cultures and customs rather than put off by perceived differences
- Value resourcefulness, are problem solvers, do-gooders, and ENJOY that part of life
- Naturally see the glass half full rather than half empty
- Are well-grounded and have no health, social, or emotional challenges
- Enjoy cooking from scratch!

It is recommended as your family considers your move to this mountaintop town in the tropics, that you honestly evaluate where you fall on the scale of each of the above characteristics.

## **Cloud Forest School**

As you have learned from our website and this information package, the Cloud Forest School is unlike any other school in Costa Rica (or Central America, for that matter!) We are an uncommon blend of local school, not-for-profit organization, conservation group, global education center and multicultural community.

As families think about joining our school, sometimes it is helpful to outline what we are *not*:

- A Montessori or Waldorf school
- A school comprised of mostly expatriate children with mostly English speaking parents
- An affluent college preparatory school, although most of our students do go onto university
- Specialized in serving students with special needs, although we do have a small SpEd program.
- A religious school, although we do honor and respect spiritual and religious beliefs

In thinking about children and their well-rounded education, it is important to address the top three things topics that are often on the forefront of parent's minds:

1. Academics – Your child will be challenged at the Cloud Forest School, but perhaps not in the same way as they would in their home school. Our English literacy program at all levels may seem “easy”, if only because the vast majority of students we serve are English language learners. However, our Spanish or science program, for example, may be where visiting students find they have to work extra-hard. It is important for parents to think about academic goals for the year, and critical to note that families who bring their children's entire home curriculum to complete while in Costa Rica are simply not as content as those who are comfortable with their children having a different kind of academic experience for the year. That said, our admissions office will work with each family to determine the best course of study for each child, and will make recommendations based upon what we are able to offer.
2. Social life – As you consider the likelihood of your child having a positive social experience with his/her new classmates and in the community, it is important to reflect upon your child's personality. A self-confident and flexible child who sees the cup as half full rather than half empty and who is naturally relaxed, curious, inquisitive and independent may have an easier transition than one who does not possess those characteristics. Children who are well-grounded and have an excellent sense of self for their age tend to do very well on a sojourn abroad with their family. A sojourn abroad will not “remedy” a child who has behavior or social issues at home or in their home schools –more often than not, those challenges tend to accentuate when abroad rather than diminish.

Some parents desire that their children automatically make lots of “tico” friends within the first few weeks of school and are mystified why they haven't been invited on play dates on weekends! A challenging part of living in a new culture includes flexing to and understanding cultural norms and mores. For example, weekends are typically nuclear/extended family time in Costa Rica, and play dates, sleepovers, etc simply are not common between rural Ticos. However, if invited on a play date, they love to participate! Our admissions office will do their best to help set up visiting families and children with a counterpart “host” family in our community at the beginning of the school year, and will organize some intercultural activities, such as cooking classes throughout the school year. However, it is important to note that much of the “Tico connection” work will fall to you and your family during your time in Costa Rica.

3. Spanish – As mentioned previously, the CFS promotes bilingualism; as such, our academic language is English but our social language on campus tends to be Spanish. However, some visiting parents have noted that the CFS has done such a great job with the local student's English that they even use it on the playground! A common expectation of visiting families is that their children will be speaking Spanish within the first month of school, and some parents

are disappointed or worried if that does not happen. *It is important to consider that second language acquisition takes time, is an invisible process, and is unique to each individual.* Just as with mathematics, art, or sports, some students are highly gifted in the languages and others need lots of extra work. It is important to set expectations at a reasonable level based upon what you know about your child. While your child may not walk away from one year at the CFS being completely fluent in Spanish, each will have a good working knowledge of the language based upon their individual levels.



## Policy for Visiting Students

Monteverde's role as a tourist destination and an ecological center of study attracts both short and long-term visitors to the region, some of whom express an interest in enrolling their children in the CFS. To accommodate visitors while maintaining the best possible learning and social environment for our full-time local students, we have developed the following guidelines. We ask parents to consider them carefully prior to making the decision to enroll their child(ren) in the CFS.

**Grade level.** We accept visiting students based upon availability at their grade level. In keeping with that, we also recognize that some students, especially in grades 7 – 11, may fall into a different grade level based upon what they have already studied in middle school or high school at home. In that case, our admissions office will work with the student's parents and home guidance counselors ahead of time to determine the best grade-level fit, academically and socially, for the visiting student.

**Repetition of course work.** Because the sequence of our elementary curriculum may not be in line with what a student is studying at home, children may find themselves repeating units previously studied, or may have to do a bit of home study in order to align themselves with their home schools to earn credit. If you have questions or concerns about this, our admissions office will gladly provide you with content level benchmarks and curricula for each of our courses, and will work with you to determine the best plan of study, in and outside of school, for your child.

**Spanish language.** While we promote bilingualism, it is important to remember that we primarily are an **English immersion** school for our local students. All grades except *kinder* (pre-school) and *prepa* (kindergarten) receive the majority of daily instruction in English. CFS students receive an hour of Spanish education daily; however, this is primarily a literature and social studies course, taught at a fluency level often not appropriate for the majority of visiting students. The CFS does provide Spanish as a Second Language specifically for our visiting students, which is a highly progressive and successful program.

**Attendance.** Attendance is an important part of being in any school, and affects all students and the classroom environment. The CFS has a year-round schedule with one week of vacation every six weeks. We require visiting students to attend daily, just as our full time students. Please use vacation time to enjoy your travels in Costa Rica and Central America.

**General.** Please keep in mind that the CFS is an independent, not-for-profit school in Central America with limited resources, especially in comparison to most visiting students' home schools. The educational issues, priorities and constraints we face differ from what visitors may be used to. We are happy to accommodate visiting families with flexibility, understanding their desire to offer their children a new and different academic experience, and ask that our visiting families enter our school with the same openness to a new culture and norms regarding education

in Costa Rica.

**Suggestions.** If at all possible, we strongly encourage prospective parents to visit the CFS and Monteverde prior to enrolling your children. If that is not possible, we encourage prospective families to work closely with our admissions office prior to enrollment to determine whether the CFS is the best match for your family's goals and expectations for the year.

### **Tuition**

Due to the CFS limit on per-class student enrollment, spaces must be held open for visiting students. In order to minimize transitions in our classrooms, we will accept as visiting students only those children who will be attending the school for at least a semester. Preferably, visiting students will start classes with the local students at the beginning of a new semester (either July or January).

### ***Payment of Tuition***

A non-refundable application fee of \$50 per student is required. In addition, a non-refundable deposit of \$250, which is credited toward the first month of tuition, is required upon acceptance in order to hold your spot, and in order for us to begin a housing search.

The deposit must be paid online with a credit card at <http://www.cloudforestschool.org>

The remainder of tuition is paid to the school in monthly or semesterly installments after your arrival. Tuition may be paid in US dollars, colones, or with a credit/debit card online or in our school office.

### **Admissions Process**

We begin accepting applications for visiting families in December and January. At the beginning of January, we will have a good idea as to which classes will have openings for the following school year and will notify families of the openings. We will begin processing applications on a first-come first-served basis. The application will include an information sheet, a few questions, and a phone or personal interview – both for the family and for the school. If a family is offered placement, a matriculation form will be sent, and a deposit to hold student spaces will be required.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How does the visa process work?**

You will enter Costa Rica on a tourist visa, which allows you and your family a 3-month stay. Within each 3-month period, you will need to leave the country for at least 72 hours. Our school schedule is amenable to “visa vacations” because we have a 1-week break every six weeks. Favorite visa vacations include visiting Nicaragua and Panama, which are our neighbors to the north and south.

### **What kind of health care is available?**

In Montverde itself, we are fortunate enough to have a good private medical service with bilingual doctors that is open 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. There is also a lab and a pharmacy in town. There are a few dentists and a gynecologist. For more serious medical issues, there are several excellent private hospitals in the San Jose area.

### **How will we find a place to live?**

The school will assist visiting families to find housing. We will send a housing questionnaire, and try to match people to houses or apartments as best as possible. Some families choose to come to Monteverde in to look around town and see the options themselves.

There are various areas in which to live:

Monteverde- A more woodsy and English-speaking area, a beautiful 40 minute walk on unpaved roads from school.

Cerro Plano – Our school neighborhood, a mixture of local Costa Ricans and visitors, many of our students live here. It is central to Santa Elena and Monteverde.

Santa Elena – The main town, mainly Tico, a 15 minute walk from school, convenient for shopping. Beyond town is the Cementerio area, 30 minute walk from school, less busy, Spanish speaking, many of our students and their families live here.

### **What is the average cost of living?**

For a family of four, one can base a budget on the following

Rent - \$400-\$600 / month

Electricity - \$ 25-50 / month

Telephone - \$ 25-50 / month

Water - \$ 10-20 / month

Food - \$ 400-600 / month

Taxis/Local transportation - \$ 25/month

Tuition – depends upon the number of children you have

### **What is Monteverde close to?**

We are pretty isolated up here in the clouds – we like to say we are about 4 hours from anywhere...the beach, the volcanoes, the city. However, abundant wildlife, an interesting community, the best fair-trade locally grown coffee and Costa Rica’s best ice cream are steps from your front door!

**Do I need to speak Spanish?**

It is important to recognize that having a working knowledge of the Spanish language is extremely helpful in communicating with local parents, our Spanish speaking staff, getting around the country, etc. Families who have very basic Spanish skills may choose to come to Costa Rica a few weeks early in order to attend one of the many intensive language schools around the nation; some begin classes while they are in their home country. Either option is highly recommended, as it will only help to aid your transition into this new culture. While in Monteverde, parents have ample opportunities to study Spanish at one of our local language schools while their children are in school. As previously mentioned, our visiting students are enrolled in our Spanish as a Second Language program throughout their whole school year.

**Is the Monteverde area a great place to learn Spanish?**

There is a lot of Spanish spoken here, and a lot of English. Depending upon where you live, and with whom you spend your free time, your exposure to Spanish will vary greatly.

**Is Monteverde a safe community?**

There is some very sporadic non-violent crime, such as breaking into vacant homes and stealing laptops and digital cameras. Keeping expensive equipment with you when leaving the house is a good idea, and people do lock their doors. In comparison with other areas of Central America, Monteverde is incredibly safe, where most people don't have bars on their windows, and let their kids walk alone to the store, their friend's house or to play soccer.

**What is the weather like?**

In the rainy season (May – Oct), it is sunny in the morning and then it rains hard around mid-afternoon. Things get muddy. There are usually a couple of very wet weeks where it rains in the morning, too. Then Monteverde experiences the windy-misty season (Nov. – Jan.), which is colder, with a blowing, wet wind, and lots of rainbows. It can get “cold” in the beginning of January (high 50s, low 60s). Everyone bundles up with fleece jackets and sweaters. By mid February dry season starts, and it is less windy, hotter, and the dirt roads begin to get dusty. By mid May the rainy season starts again. We all have pants, sweaters, shorts, long sleeve and short sleeve shirts, hiking boots, rain boots, sneakers, sandals, and a couple of nicer outfits in our closets. In general, Costa Rican custom is to dress neatly, but casually.

**Are there insects and other critters in the cloud forest?**

Yes - in the forest, classrooms and houses as well! Finding large moths, scorpions, or a parade of ants in your house is not necessarily common, but would not be unusual. Unless someone has an extreme fear of insects, snakes, or spiders it is easy to adapt – we learn to appreciate the diversity of life here, and eventually realize that large, bat sized moths are beautiful!

**Do people often have trouble with transitioning to life in Monteverde?**

It is normal to have ups and downs during your first year in a new country. At first everything seems new and exciting – it's life in the tropics! However, after a while novelty may wear off, and simple things like not having access to your favorite snack or tea, or when the grocery store stops carrying powdered cocoa when you had just gotten to be a pro at making homemade brownies, or when internet connections are not always working...all can create a level of discomfort and frustration. If you don't speak Spanish, the transition can be more challenging if you do not understand the common/daily language of our school children and staff, not to mention the community. Children miss their friends from home, parents can too (thank goodness for Skype and web cams!)

For some people, it can be an emotional up and down as one adjusts to their surroundings, and every person and family handles culture shock differently. It is important to remember that as in nature, things flow in a cycle. Just when you thought Spanish would be your life's biggest challenge, you will be speaking with the locals, or just when you thought the rain would never end, you'll be missing your umbrella on those hot days in March! All of a sudden you'll be making homemade tortillas without thinking about it and will truly appreciate that items such as coffee, cheese, milk, veggies, etc. are created by our neighbors in this small mountaintop town.

It is important to know that we have a very supportive community, ready to help visitors with their transition - to answer any questions and to lend a helping hand. Our admissions office works closely with new visiting families and students to provide support with anything from academics to social customs, from living logistics (such as what to do with your garbage) to where to get your hair cut!

### **What are the typical stages of cultural transition?**

The process of adjusting to a new culture can be very different from one person to the next. Adapting to life in Monteverde and at the Cloud Forest School may take more or less time for you, depending on who you are. Many people go through a period of personal frustration or disenchantment with their new environment, known as cultural transition or "culture shock." This is a normal part of adjusting to a new place. WHEN you experience culture shock, just remember that you are not alone. Even people who are well traveled find themselves traversing some stages of cultural transition. The acute stage of cultural transition usually doesn't last long. Although each person's experience will be different and will depend on the individual situation, the following are typical stages of cultural transition.

#### ***Honeymoon stage***

When you first arrive, you may experience exhilaration, anticipation, nervousness, and excitement. Settling in takes a significant amount of time and energy. This stage can last from a few days or weeks to several months, depending on your circumstances.

#### ***Hostility stage***

In the second or third month, you may begin to notice annoying details about your new environment. It may seem as if people here don't understand you, or you may have difficulty understanding them. You may feel frustrated or depressed when you have trouble communicating or getting things done. You might wish things could be as they are at home. Don't despair! These feelings will fade as you gain confidence.

#### ***Acceptance stage***

After six months or so, you may start appreciating the differences between your home country and your new environment. You may regain a sense of humour and feel more balanced. The minor mistakes and misunderstandings that would have frustrated you before may now just make you smile or even laugh.

#### ***Adaptation stage***

Eventually, you may begin to feel at home in your new environment and find greater satisfaction, both personally and academically.

### ***Coping with Cultural Transition***

Give yourself time to adjust to your new environment.

Get involved in activities, so that you meet new people and make friends faster.

Write letters, send emails, or make phone calls to friends and family back home. These relationships can help keep you grounded.

Manage your stress by staying healthy: eat well, get enough sleep, and stay physically active.

Talk with others about your cultural transition – you will be surprised by how many of them have had similar experiences.

### **What is your typical class size, and student population?**

In grades K-4, 15-18 students per class is normal. In grades 5-7, 17-20 is average and in grades 8-11, 12-20 students per class is the norm. In a typical 15 student classroom, 1 or 2 would be a visitor (native English speaking students) and the rest local students. Out of the local students, one may have learning disability; four may be from poor families that struggle to make tuition payment every month, four families in lower-middle income who have jobs like taxi drivers, or cleaning in hotels, and four families who own local hotels or businesses.

### **How established and set is your curriculum?**

As an ever-growing and learning educational community, our curriculum is in a constant state of revision. We have clear themes, benchmarks, and curriculum guidelines.

**I'm excited about environmental education, will my child be outside every day?**

We are a school, responsible for preparing our students for their future, and the possibility of going to university or pursuing whatever the future holds for them. We teach reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. We also integrate environmental education into our themes. Every class has outdoor activities at least once a week, and some classes spend more time outside, depending on what they are studying at the moment. In the elementary level, four out of six annual thematic units involve the environment. At the high school level the need to reach specific governmental benchmarks effects our curriculum a bit more, but students still have at least one hour a week outside, and very often more.

Students often have special spaces outside where they do writing, they also go on hikes, use our native plant nursery and reforestation project for experiments. Each of our classroom buildings is surrounded by nature and, being Monteverde, nature finds itself inside as much as we find ourselves outside! Many students walk through the woods to get to class, and many have views of the forest or the Gulf of Nicoya right from their classrooms. Math lessons have been known to be interrupted by a sloth climbing down a tree outside of a window, or a troupe of monkeys may pass by the soccer field during P.E.! We are a K-11 school that sits upon a unique campus with a wonderful and in-progress environmental education program which continues to grow and develop new programs and activities for our students. We have a land manager who works on the grounds to make sure that the gardens, reforestation areas, and projects are ready for students to work and accompanies classes on many of their outdoor experiences. Our environmental education coordinator works with classroom teachers and also provides classes with engaging lessons, and outdoor projects on campus and in the community.