Rancho Mastatal Sustainability Education Center is an education center, working permaculture farm, lodge and community rooted in environmental sustainability, meaningful, place-based livelihoods, and caring relationships.

We have been welcoming groups into the Mastatal community since 2001. Our programs reflect the better world we are trying to build, brick by earthen brick, student by inquiring student. For over a decade we have been sharing authentic, passionate, and inspiring visits with students from around the world.

Our program is unique. We fully integrate your students and leadership team into our community and home. This is where we live as well as where we work. A Ranch visit is an invitation to work on our projects, play in our games, share in our meals, and truly live beside us. The Core Team, Apprentices, and “Tico” Team all bring a passion that will empower your students to see the world differently. There is a heart and soul to Rancho Mastatal that is felt by all who come explore with us.

We are located in the rural farming town of Mastatal, situated on the edge of the last remaining virgin rainforest of Costa Rica’s beautiful Puriscal County.
Our experiential, skill-building based curriculum fills an important gap in today's conventional academic programming. Outdoor oriented and hands-on programs allow students the opportunity to get dirty and learn skills that are pertinent to the well-being of our planet while inspiring them to make concrete, positive changes in their lives. Our curriculum is designed to establish solutions to the environmental challenges of our time and to show alternative paths toward a more place-based lifestyle.

The below teaching themes reflect what we do on the Ranch on a daily basis. We are able to design entire courses around a single topic, such as natural building, or provide a diversity of “plug and play” modules to best meet your group's needs. Teaching themes are usually a mix of lectures and “walk and talks.” Most themes and hands-on activities last between two and four hours.

### Permaculture and Agroforestry

**Teaching Themes:**
- Permaculture ethics and principles
- Permaculture design methodologies
- Tropical ecology
- Water in the landscape
- Soil fertility strategies: microorganisms, mulch, biochar, and manures
- Organic gardening
- Farming in nature's image: agroforestry
- Plant propagation and breeding
- Tropical plant selection
- Waste management: greywater and blackwater
- Invisible structures: social and economic systems

**Hands-On Activities:**
- Nursery work
- Earthwork construction
- Erosion control planting
- Fruit tree care
- Garden composting
- Tool sharpening
- Garden maintenance

### Food and Fermentation

**Teaching Themes:**
- Creating the foodshed
- Utilization of whole foods--post-harvest handling
- Fermentation principles and practices
- Cooking with fire, sun, and methane
- Meat: chicken slaughter and butchering
- Milk: intro to dairy fermentation
- Vegetables: vegetable storage and preservation through fermentation
- Fruits and sugars: uses of fruit sugars and transformation through fermentation
- Nuts, seeds, and legumes: processing coconuts for water, meat, milk, and oil
- Starches: introduction to tropical starches
- Herbs and spices: processing of medicinals

**Hands-On Activities:**
- Vegetable fermentation
- Live culture herbal and medicinal sodas
- Alcohol brewing
- Medicinal herb processing and drying
- Coconut processing
- Tropical starch preparation
Natural Building

Teaching Themes:
- Introduction to natural building.
- Foundation construction
- Wall systems: load and non-load bearing
- Roofing systems
- Climate Design
- Lime plasters
- Earthen pasters
- Introduction to timber framing
- Home Design
- Furniture design and drafting

Hands-On Activities:
- Foundation construction
- Earth mixing and sculpting
- Wattle and daub wall construction
- Cob and adobe construction
- Lime pastering and tadelakt
- Earthen plastering
- Mortise and tenon joinery
- Wood working tool care and use

Additional Topics
- Alternative cooking technologies
- Alternative energy
- Soap making
- Community development
- Communal living and organizational Structures
- Local economies
- The Ranch history and story
- Wilderness first aid essentials
- Starting a green business

Additional Activities

In the town of Mastatal
- La Iguana Chocolate tour
- Trapiche (sugar cane mill) tour
- Villas Mastatal tour
- Finca Siempre Verde tour

With local guides
- Basket weaving and forest walk
- Medicinal plant walk
- Indigenous skills practice
- Night hike

In our Private Wildlife Reserve
- Rio Grande waterfall hike
- La Quina river and swimming hole hike
Sample Itineraries

The sample itineraries below provide an example of the type of curriculum that we can build for your group. We can also custom-design an itinerary to better fit your specific desires, foci, or needs.

4 Day Trip

Day 1: Arrive early, orientation and property tour. Visit the Rio Grande waterfall. Enjoy a pickup game of soccer or frisbee at the community field.

Day 2: Process food in the morning (making juice, sorting beans, processing jackfruit, etc.). Introduction to natural building in the afternoon, help build an earthen wall for one of our structures.

Day 3: Hike through the forest to the Quina, our favorite swimming hole. Tour La Iguana Chocolate afterwards and learn how to make chocolate.

Day 4: Wake up early for departure.

7 Day Trip

Day 1: Arrive early, orientation and property tour. Visit the Rio Grande waterfall. Enjoy a pickup game of soccer or frisbee at the community field.

Day 2: Introduction to topics around agriculture, farming, and food security. Tour the Ranch’s food forest. Harvest greens, herbs, and fruit from the farm to help prepare for the next meal.

Day 3: Process food in the morning (making juice, sorting beans, processing jackfruit, etc.). Tour La Iguana Chocolate afterwards and learn how to make chocolate.

Day 4: Practice pruning and mulching the orchards while discussing soil fertility strategies. Work in the nursery after lunch to learn about plant propagation.

Day 5: Hike through the forest to the Quina, our favorite swimming hole. Learn about the art of fermentation and make pickles in the afternoon.

Day 6: Continue fermenting while making your own homemade sodas. Head to the waterfall one last time before departure. Group debrief in the evening.

Day 7: Wake up early for departure.

Location and Region

Our campus is situated between the La Cangreja National Park and the small, 100-person community of Mastatal. We are three hours from San Jose and the primary airport and one hour from the coastal highway. Within two hours are the surf beach of Jaco, the mangroves of Esterillos, and famed Manual Antonio National Park.

Mastatal is a hub for sustainability, with a number of active eco-tourism projects, a thriving town center, great birding opportunities, and a strong rural culture.
Facilities and Amenities

**Classroom**
A 1000 sq ft, open air, bamboo structure. Equipped with tables, chairs, fans, storage closet, projector and massage table.

**Bunkhouse**
19 beds situated a short walk from the classroom. Three showers, solar hot water, and two composting toilets.

**Ceiba Lounge and Foodsmithery**
Earthen circular meeting space and teaching kitchen. Located next to our dining facilities and library.

**Kitchen**
Scrumptous and filling buffet style meals. Sourced from local farmers and our organic permaculture farm. Fermented foods at every meal.

**Private Wildlife Reserve**
300 acres of forest surrounding our campus. Waterfalls and swimming holes abound. 14 kilometers of hiking trails to explore.

**Community**
National Park *La Cangreja* borders our reserve. Soccer field, town library, and local restaurant all within easy walking distance.

**Teaching Team**
Our teaching team is made up of our Core Team with ample support from our Apprentice Team. The Core Team includes Tim O’Hara, Robin Nunes, Nic Donati, Rachel Jackson, Laura Killingbeck, and Scott Gallant. All of our instructors have over seven years working and teaching on-site.

**Costs**
- Room and board, ranch instructor and facility fee:
  - $60 to $110 per student per day
  - This is dependent on number of students, activities, and other factors.
  - We custom design programs to meet groups needs and budget.
- Additional activities (La Iguana Chocolate tour, guided night hike, etc.) have their own associated costs.
Deliverables and Takeaways

- Students will leave our programs better empowered to become leaders in their schools and communities.
- Students will leave the Ranch not only inspired but equipped with real, practical skills that they can begin applying at home.
- Students will gain a new perspective on how they can positively impact the world.
- Students will be transformed by their experience living in a another culture.
- Students will be exposed to innovative ideas and ways of thinking that will prepare them for the environmental, economic and social challenges of our times.
- Students will see and learn first-hand the importance of the world's tropical rainforests.
- Students will leave more in tune with regenerative systems that provide human needs in a responsible manner.
- Students participating in our programs will become part of an extensive alumni network of people who have been transformed by their experience at Rancho Mastatal.

Testimonials

“To all those considering bringing their student groups to Rancho Mastatal, I would offer this. On our last day, I shared a walk up to the Main House alongside one of the teaching apprentices, Mark. I asked about his plans for the day, knowing that Sundays are rest days and that it had been a full-on 10 days working the farm with our students. Mark smiled and began to name the things he planned to do: A final chess match with Oliver, one of our students. A guitar-restringing lesson with Benji, another of our students. A hope to take a music-sharing walk-and-talk with Molly, a third student of ours. On and on, Mark named individual student exchanges he planned to seek out that day. Exchanges which, a) had little to do with the formal Ranch curriculum and b) had everything to do with having built truly unique, special, individual relationships with our students. And throughout the day, I watched Mark create space for each of these one-on-one moments. Months later, these memories are still at the forefront of our students’ minds and the core of the stories they tell about their time in Central America. This is the heart and soul of Rancho Mastatal.

When you arrive at the Ranch, Scott will tell you and your students that your time there will change your lives. As educators and students, we have been told time and time again that THIS will be the thing that changes your life. Yet, truly, Rancho Mastatal IS that place. The people your students meet and the experiences they build will carve a place in their very selves so that they never look at the world - and their engagement in it - in the same way again.”

Dr. Beth D. Warsof, PhD
Field Advisor, 2015-16
Winterline Global Skills Program

“We have been exceptionally happy working with Rancho Mastatal. It is a great learning/teaching facility in a remarkable location. Most importantly, the RM team is top notch. They are attentive, professional, passionate, and really know their stuff. Our students consistently reference their time at Mastatal using phrases like “life-changing” and “incredible.” Highly recommended for anyone serious about educating for sustainability and global learning.”

Jeff Sharp
Co-Founder
Sustainable Summer
“Over the past fifteen years Rancho Mastatal has hosted dozens of our student programs, and each group is welcomed with open arms and treated like old friends. Whether our group is large or small, or we are visiting for a few days or a few weeks, Rancho Mastatal integrates our students into their community with ease. While Tim, Robin, Laura, Scott, and the core team members are readily available to answer questions, give demonstrations, and share insights into their daily routines and the larger mission of the ranch, they are also respectful and accommodating of our course objectives. Running a field course is a demanding task, and one of the biggest challenges for instructors is keeping the logistical component from diluting the academic content. The team at Rancho Mastatal understands this, and provides the reliability and support we need to keep our programs on track, and yet are flexible enough to accommodate our variable schedule. This allows us to keep the focus on the curriculum and provides a richer experience for our students.

A central theme of our courses is to encourage our students to explore the connection between nature, conservation, and community, and Rancho Mastatal is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when a high value is placed on living sustainability and equitability. Our core lessons are reinforced by their commitment to natural building and a focus on local food production. The living structures feature a variety of sustainable techniques using locally sourced materials that minimize environmental impact. For example, the methane cooking fuel produced from the biodigester toilets is always a big hit with the students, and provides for interesting discussion and reflection on the low sustainability of traditional western systems. In stark contrast to industrialized food production, the farming activities at Rancho Mastatal have been carefully integrated into the landscape, with keen attention paid toward working in harmony with nature’s processes, and this helps our students to see the connection between healthy food and a healthy environment. In fact, we often have had students comment that it is difficult for them to see where the forest stops and the farm begins.

Perhaps the strongest endorsement for Rancho Mastatal I can offer comes from our students. While, our programs visit several locations in Costa Rica, our student feedback surveys consistently state that they wish to have had more time at Rancho Mastatal. I know exactly how they feel.”

Robert Tournay
Director of Programs
Tropical Adventures in Education, LLC

Next Steps

We appreciate your interest in our programs and would love to hear from you about how we can help make your trip a reality. Please write or call us with any questions:

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011 (506) 2200 0920
www.ranchomastatal.com/

You can also find us on social media:

Facebook
Instagram
Flickr

Thank You!
The Ranch Crew