

Information for Volunteering at Estacion Las Tortugas

Night Patrols

This is the main part or your work here at the turtle station and the part that we couldn't do without you! Turtle patrol!

Schedule

Every night 4 groups go out on the beach and keep watch walking up and down 3km of beach. Two groups leave early, around 8pm, patrolling different sectors of the beach and returning at 12 midnight. The next two groups go out later on, around midnight and return 4 hours later. Who goes out and when, is decided by Stanley Rodriguez, the director of the project, and it is announced during dinner time which shift has been allocated to each member of staff and volunteers.

Groups

Every group consists of a researcher, who will help train you and tell you what to do at all times. The researcher is usually accompanied by an assistant. They lead one of the student groups. Guards will also be patrolling the beach for safety reasons, to make sure everything is running smoothly and to keep poachers at bay. Don't worry we have not had any trouble with them as yet, it is just precaution.

Research

This project was started in dire need to protect the leatherback turtle that, unfortunately partly due to poaching (because of the erroneous belief of aphrodisiac properties and the increased protein content of the leatherback's eggs) has become a critically endangered species.

The beach has to be patrolled every night and collection of the eggs from the visiting turtles and relocation to a hatchery or to a specific part of the beach is essential no matter what the weather conditions. There we can keep an eye on the development of the eggs, protecting them from any intruders, including animal predators. The research groups going out help with this process together with collecting data of the turtle that laid the nest (eg. length/width of the carapace, number of fertile/infertile eggs laid, tagging and other biometric data). Abiotic data is also collected (eg. time, temperature, rainfall, etc). You will be urged to follow a talk on sea turtles and their conservation so you can get a better view of how and why carrying out projects like this one is important and what is needed to protect and save our oceans for future generations.

Do's and Don't's

For safety reasons and for conservation issues there are certain rules that have to be followed while on the beach at night:

X No electronics

X No white flashlights (unless specified by your guide)

X No repellent

X Do not walk in front of your guide

X Do not walk in front of the turtle

Yes Wear dark clothes (you can be seen on the beach with light clothes)

Yes Wear close-toed shoes (Crocs type shoes are great!)

Yes Drink lots of water!

Yes Bring rain gear (the weather is unpredictable, it can rain anytime!)

Daytime Activities

Although the main work is carried out during night patrol, there are a range of jobs and activities to participate during the day as well.

Hatchery

The beginning of the season starts off with the building of a hatchery, the protected area where we deposit all the nests we bring back from night patrol. It is a safe area which helps us monitor the development of the turtle nests. To provide an ideal environment the chosen area has to be de-rooted down to a metre deep to get rid of any roots that might threaten the developing eggs. Then it has to be fenced off to prevent any kind of predator. Sometimes sand bags need to be placed as the sea can come up quite high and flood the entire hatchery. All this is a lengthy process where we need as many people as possible to help!

Hatchlings

During the hatching period (which starts about 60 days after the first leatherback of the season has come up onto the beach to lay), the hatchery has to be monitored constantly to record the emergence of any hatchlings arising from the sand. Then the hatchlings have to be weighed and measured (length/width of carapace), before being released into the sea when darkness starts to fall.

Excavations

After three days of a group of hatchlings emerging from the nest, there is a process called "excavations" that the researchers have to go through. For this they always welcome as much help as possible. This is quite a smelly process but very interesting and extremely important to determine the hatching success rate of the leatherback turtle and to determine whether our efforts are paying off! This involves digging into the nest that has already hatched and excavating all the remains. The eggs that haven't hatched are then opened one by one, providing us with data to help us understand why these eggs did not succeed in hatching. The empty eggshells give us a clear view of the number of hatchlings emerged.

Abiotic Data

Some abiotic data is collected during the day as well, such as rainfall, temperature (air, sea, sand). Beach profiling helps us understand the dynamics of the beach and the nest site selection of the nesting leatherbacks. Beach clean-ups are done regularly, especially after storms and other activities depending on the conditions at the time.

Students

We have regular student groups visiting the project for three-day periods usually. Help is often needed with organizing their activities, such as beach work, maintenance work, talks, jungle treks, boat rides, visits to the Education Centre, games...

So as you can see, there are always things to do if you choose to, but there will also be plenty of time to play sports, get involved with the local family, as well as to relax on the beach during the day, swing in a hammock and enjoy the wildlife and the beautiful location! It depends on you how how involved you want to get!

You are welcome to carry out your own study if you wish, just let us know beforehand so we can see whether it is feasible to carry it out within the station grounds and whether we can give you a hand if needed!

What to bring

Here are a few ideas to make you stay at the station more comfortable:

- Backpack (suitcases don't go well over jungle trails)
- Day pack (for your trips out of the station)
- Waterproof bags for your luggage (as for traveling in and out of the station when raining)
- Water bottle
- Flashlight (headlight preferably, with a red light for patrol and a normal one to get around the grounds at night, or for reading after dark)
- Lighter (in case solar power runs out on a rainy day, it's back to candles)
- Trainers/Crocs with socks for night patrol
- Flip flops/Sandals
- Dark pants and dark T-shirts for patrol (at least 2 sets as sometimes it rains and they don't dry in time)
- Day clothes and old clothes for beach work. Bring a jacket for an occasional cold night
- Rain gear/poncho (for beach patrol), umbrella (to get around grounds when it's pouting with rain in the day)
- Towel
- Hat (to avoid sunstroke when walking on the beach during the day)
- Sunscreen and after-sun
- Mosquito net
- Sarong (to serve as a curtain)
- Insect repellent (good repellent sold in nearby town)
- Washing powder (clothes washed by hand)
- Clothes pegs (in case it gets windy)
- Clothesline (to hang in your room if it's raining)
- Toiletries
- An extra pair of glasses/contact lenses (if you wear them, in case they get lost)
- Sunglasses
- Personal first aid kit (if you want your own, as there is one at the station)
- Personal medication
- Alarm clock
- Adapter (to charge your electronics if coming from outside the States or Canada)
- Spare batteries (for flashlight, as they can run out quite fast)
- Camera
- Music
- Something to read (we do have a few books at the station as well)
- Journal
- Snacks (you could get hungry in between meals or after late night patrol)
- Zip lock bags (to keep any food items away from ants)
- Important documents

- Passport
- Travel documents (and visa if needed for your country)
- Travel insurance

Photocopies of all the above documents should be kept with you at all times when leaving the station, rather than carrying the originals. The originals should be kept in zip lock bags for protection from humidity. A passport is needed for most bank transactions. Remove any cards or documents before leaving home that you definitely do not need while traveling, such as library cards, gym membership cards, receipts, etc.

Currency

The currency of Costa Rica is the "colon" ("colones in plural"). To check exchange rates a good site is: www.xe.com

The best way to access your funds in Costa Rica is by debit card/ATMs. It is faster and cheaper than traveler's checks, better than carrying large amounts of cash on you and a good way to avoid credit card fees. The PLUS system is the most widely distributed international ATM (CIRRUS is available at many major tourist destinations). It is a good idea to have two ATM cards, so you have a better chance of matching the local system and avoiding fees. Check the fees charged to your card with your bank before you leave.

Facilities

Communication

There is a phone at the station you can use by buying an international card (about \$6) which gives you about 10 minutes for Europe and about 15-20 minutes for the States. You can use your mobile phone if you prefer but the only signal around is if you take it to the beach. Contact your mobile phone provider to make sure you can use your phone in Costa Rica before you travel.

Unfortunately at the moment we do not have internet access at the project, although it is possible if you are using roaming on your phone and are able to get a signal on the beach. Then there is also the cheap option to buy a local costa rican SIM card (KOLBI has the best signal), which could save you the roaming costs. There is an internet cafe in Matina and Bataan, the two nearby towns and you can arrange to leave the station either with a staff member if they are going that way and if there is room in the car, or otherwise you can get there yourself by calling a taxi (about \$12 one-way). Usually our volunteers arrange to go out in groups to share the cost.

Shopping

You can go shopping in the nearest towns of either Matina or Bataan. Matina has a small mini market, a bakery, an ice cream parlour and a couple of clothes shops, so not very much. Bataan however is a bit bigger and has a few supermarkets, an internet cafe, clothes shops, bakery, grocery store, butcher's, pharmacy, hospital, post office, bookshop, hairdressers, a few restaurants/canteens and surely other things we have forgotten to mention. It is still a small town though so any major shopping you want to do before you leave would be better and cheaper in San Jose or Puerto Limon.

Prices

The following prices cover transportation from the airport and first night's accommodation in San Jose if needed, transportation whether by public transport or private transport to the project site from San Jose, all accommodation and food while at the project site and your training. When you leave for the airport, the accommodation in San Jose and airport transfer is included at no extra charge. Please note that these prices do

not apply for student groups coming for 2/3 nights. Also note that these prices are subject to change, so please get in touch with us for up to date fees.

1 -3 weeks = \$35.00 per day

1 month = \$35.00 per day

2 months = \$30.00 per day

3 months = \$25.00 per day

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