

# Volunteer Info Pack – Playa Tortuga

Your conservation journey begins here!



## Welcome to Playa Tortuga

¡Hola! Welcome to the **Playa Tortuga Sea Turtle Conservation Volunteer Programme** in Costa Rica. We are delighted that you're interested in joining us. This short info pack will give you an overview of the project and help you prepare for an unforgettable conservation experience. At the Playa Tortuga project, run by local community members and scientists, you'll be part of a team dedicated to protecting sea turtles and other amazing wildlife. We work closely with local communities and international partners to promote environmental awareness and **create a culture of conservation** along Costa Rica's beautiful southern Pacific coast.

Located near the village of **Ojochal de Osa**, about 3.5 hours from San José, our project base is nestled between tropical rainforest and secluded beaches. Whether you're volunteering solo or with family, expect a warm welcome into our "reserve family". We aim to make sure you feel safe, informed, and inspired throughout your stay. This pack covers all the essentials – from project highlights and activities to travel details and what to bring. We hope it answers your questions and demonstrates that you'll be in good hands. Your conservation journey begins here, and we can't wait to share the adventure with you!

## Project Highlights

- **Sea Turtle Conservation:** Patrol protected beaches at night to find nesting sea turtles, collect their eggs for incubation in a guarded hatchery, and release hatchlings safely to the sea. You'll directly help increase endangered sea turtle survival. *(Since 2009, volunteers and staff have released over 60,000 baby turtles!)*
- **Work with Diverse Wildlife:** Beyond turtles, join ongoing research on **crocodiles, mammals, birds, butterflies, and reptiles**. One day you might help track monkeys or monitor caimans, and the next assist in our butterfly garden or bird surveys. Every day brings new discoveries in the rainforest.
- **Family-Friendly Volunteering:** This project is open to individuals, families and groups. Children aged 7+ can volunteer with a parent/guardian, making it a

fantastic opportunity to inspire younger conservationists in a safe, educational environment.

- **Immerse in Costa Rican Nature & Culture:** Live on-site at a coastal reserve teeming with wildlife. Explore pristine beaches and jungles in your free time and experience the “pura vida” lifestyle of rural Costa Rica. The local community is friendly, and volunteers often engage with environmental education for local children.
- **Support a Non-Profit Initiative:** Your participation directly contributes to a grassroots conservation organisation. Volunteer fees include a donation that keeps the research and protection work going. You’ll leave knowing you made a real difference for wildlife and the local community.

## Volunteer Activities

Our volunteer programme offers a wide variety of **conservation activities**, with a special focus on sea turtles during nesting season. Here’s an overview of the engaging tasks you may be involved in:



### **Sea Turtle Conservation Programme**

#### **(Main season: July – December)**

Sea turtle work is the heart of Playa Tortuga. During nesting season, Olive Ridley sea turtles regularly come ashore on Playa Tortuga beach (with occasional Green or Leatherback turtles). Peak nesting occurs in September and October. Volunteers help to:

- **Patrol the Beach at Night\***: Walk the starlit beach with our biologists to locate nesting mother turtles or freshly laid nests. You'll learn how to spot turtle tracks and safely approach a nesting turtle. These night patrols deter egg poachers and ensure any nesting turtles are protected during this vulnerable time.

*\*Activity only available for accompanied children aged 12 and over.*

- **Egg Relocation & Hatchery Care**: When a turtle lays eggs, the team carefully collects the eggs and relocates them to our secure hatchery – a fenced nursery on the reserve – to protect them from predators, high tides, and poaching. Volunteers monitor the hatchery round-the-clock in shifts. You'll help record data like nest temperatures and incubation times, and keep the area clean and safe.
- **Baby Turtle Releases**: The most magical moments! When eggs hatch (usually after ~45–55 days), you'll assist in releasing the baby tortuguitas onto the beach, watching as they make their way to the ocean under the moonlight. It's an incredibly rewarding experience to know that thanks to your help, these hatchlings have a much better chance of survival.
- **Beach Clean-ups & Monitoring**: Volunteers also do daytime patrols to clean the beach of debris (logs, litter, etc.) and check for any new nests or hatchling emergencies. Keeping the nesting beach clean and safe is an important part of turtle conservation.
- **Data Recording**: You'll be trained to take measurements of turtles (when encountered nesting) and record important data for research. This might include tagging turtles, noting the number of eggs, nest locations, and environmental conditions. All this data helps in understanding and protecting the turtle populations.

*Playa Tortuga was officially declared an important turtle nesting beach in 2014 thanks to these efforts. By volunteering, you play a critical role in continuing this success!*



## Crocodile & Reptile Monitoring

Playa Tortuga is situated by the mouth of the Térraba River, home to American crocodiles and caimans. Outside of turtle nesting season (or occasionally during, schedule permitting), volunteers can join our **Crocodilian Monitoring Programme**. This thrilling project involves:

- **Night River Surveys:** About once every two weeks, a small team goes on a nocturnal boat expedition along the river. Using spotlights to scan for the red glow of crocodile eyes in the dark, the team counts and records sightings to estimate croc population density.
- **Capturing & Measuring (Expert-led):** Occasionally, the biologists will safely capture a small crocodile or caiman to collect measurements and other data (length, weight, etc.). As a volunteer, you won't handle the crocs yourself – that's for trained staff – but you'll assist by helping take notes and learn up-close about these fascinating reptiles. Participation in the boat surveys is decided by the project biologist based on safety and volunteer interest.
- **Reptile & Amphibian Walks:** On other nights, you might join guided walks in the forest to find and identify snakes, frogs, lizards, and other nocturnal creatures. Costa Rica has over 140 snake species! Don't worry, our herpetology experts handle any snake that needs to be moved or measured. You'll help spot animals and record observations. These surveys contribute to understanding the abundance and behaviour of reptiles and amphibians on the reserve.



### **Mammal Tracking & Wildlife Surveys**

The reserve's forests are home to a variety of mammals – from cheeky white-faced capuchin monkeys and howler monkeys to more elusive creatures like ocelots, coatis, raccoons, and sloths. Volunteers assist in our **Mammal Inventory Project** and other wildlife monitoring by:

- **Setting Camera Traps:** Hiking the forest trails with staff to look for animal tracks, burrows, or feeding signs. When we find evidence of mammals, we set up motion-activated camera traps. Volunteers help check the cameras weekly, retrieve footage, and log any wildlife sightings (it's always exciting to see what passed by!).
- **Monkey Surveys:** A couple of times a week, you might head out in the early morning or late afternoon to observe monkeys. We track troop movements through the reserve, noting how many individuals we see, their behaviours (eating, resting, carrying babies, etc.), and their locations via GPS. Over time this helps us understand how monkey populations are faring and using the habitat.
- **General Wildlife Observation:** You'll naturally encounter all sorts of critters during your activities – from colourful frogs and insects to possibly an anteater or deer. Volunteers often help keep a log of all notable wildlife spotted on the reserve. Every bit of data helps our research.



## Bird & Butterfly Projects

Playa Tortuga is a paradise for birds and insects too. As a volunteer, you may get involved in some truly enchanting projects:

- **Bird Monitoring:** With over 200 bird species in the region, there's plenty to see. Volunteers join staff in regular bird counts. Scarlet macaws are a highlight – we monitor a local population of these vibrant parrots by recording sightings twice a week. You don't need to be an expert birder; we'll teach you how to identify common species and use tools like binoculars (bring your own if you have them!) or birding apps. Early mornings are best for bird spotting, so grab a cup of coffee and enjoy the dawn chorus!
- **Butterfly Garden:** Our on-site Butterfly Garden is not only a research project but also an educational exhibit for local students. Volunteers help maintain the garden by collecting and identifying butterflies, transplanting host plants, and caring for caterpillars and pupae. You'll assist in keeping records in the lab, and if you're lucky, witness a butterfly emerging for the first time. This project is a wonderful way to learn about insect life cycles and contribute to environmental education. The butterfly garden serves as a "living classroom" for studying butterfly behaviour, longevity, and more.



## Environmental Education & Community Outreach

Conservation isn't just about research – it's also about community. Throughout the year, Playa Tortuga runs **environmental education and outreach activities** that volunteers sometimes participate in, such as:

- **Beach and River Clean-ups:** Local school groups and our team clean the nearby beaches (Playa Tortuga and Playa Ventanas) and the Balso River.
- **Community Projects:** Depending on the time of year, you might help out with our kids' Summer Camp, assist in tree planting or gardening days, or even contribute to our Eco-Club activities with local youth.
- **Teaching & Outreach:** If you have a passion for sharing knowledge, you could get involved in giving short workshops or presentations (in English or Spanish) to visitors and schoolchildren about what we do at the reserve.

## Accommodation & Meals



As a volunteer, you'll stay at the project's **field station** on the reserve – a comfortable but rustic volunteer house where everyone lives together. It's a bit like staying in a friendly, no-frills eco-lodge! Here's what to expect from your home away from home:

- **Sleeping Arrangements:** Volunteers stay in single private rooms, or a family room, or a double room, or a single with bunk beds, equipped with sturdy beds with quality mattresses. Each room has storage shelves or drawers for your belongings, and screened windows to keep bugs out. We provide all bed linens (sheets, pillow, light blankets). There are ceiling or standing fans to keep you cool at night. It's basic accommodation, but clean and cosy.
- **Bathrooms:** Shared bathrooms with flush toilets and hot-water showers are on-site. We ask everyone to keep the bathrooms and common areas clean after use – a quick rinse of sand and a tidy up helps a lot.
- **Common Areas:** The station has an indoor lounge and dining area, a small library of wildlife books, and an outdoor seating area where volunteers often relax in the evenings. It's a great space to socialise, play cards or guitar, and log the day's sightings in the project notebook. There's also a kitchen which is the heart of the house (more on food below).
- **Internet & Electricity:** Wi-Fi internet is available at the station, so you can stay in touch with family (though remember the focus is on nature – we encourage limited screen time!). Electricity is reliable most of the time, but heavy rainstorms can occasionally cause outages. We have solar-powered backup for essentials, and lanterns for the rare power cut.
- **Laundry:** You'll have access to on-site laundry facilities. Volunteers can use the washing machine about once per week (we schedule turns to conserve water and energy). There's a covered drying area and even a solar drying tent for wet clothes – handy in the rainy season.

**Meals:** Keeping volunteers well-fed is important! **Three meals a day** are provided, and we cater to most diets (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free etc. – just let us know your needs in advance). Here's how meals work:

- **Breakfast:** Typically self-serve. We stock the kitchen with staples like cereal, bread, eggs, fruits, yogurt, local coffee etc. Volunteers prepare their own breakfast whenever they wake up. Early patrol last night? Feel free to sleep in a bit and grab breakfast later – just be ready for the day's activities.
- **Lunch:** A hearty Costa Rican lunch is cooked for you by our station cook on weekdays (Monday–Friday). This is usually the main meal of the day and might

include dishes like gallo pinto (the classic rice-and-beans), salads, chicken or fish, pasta, or stew, always with plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit juice. On weekends, volunteers prepare their own lunch from the available ingredients (or you might choose to try a local restaurant in town).

- **Dinner:** Volunteers take turns preparing dinner (or everyone pitches in together) using the food supplies in the kitchen. Dinner is often lighter – perhaps burritos, a stir-fry, sandwiches, or a big salad – but it’s really up to you and your fellow volunteers. Cooking together can be a fun evening activity. We often share international dishes and cooking tips!
- **Snacks & Beverages:** We keep basic snacks (like fruit, biscuits, peanut butter) and drinks (tea, coffee, juice) available. Clean drinking water is always on tap (bring your reusable bottle!). All beverages are included – we have water, coffee, tea, and juice. **Alcohol is not allowed on-site**, to keep the environment safe and respectful for all. You’re welcome to enjoy a beer or cocktail in town on your day off, but please do not bring it to the reserve.
- **Dietary Needs:** We can accommodate most dietary restrictions (vegetarian, vegan, lactose-free, etc.) as long as you inform us ahead of time. The local diet features a lot of rice, beans, vegetables, tropical fruits, chicken, fish, and some meat. If you require specialty items (e.g. gluten-free bread or soy milk), these can be purchased when we do supply runs – again, just let us know.

Everyone is expected to help keep the kitchen and dining area clean. We operate like a family – washing your own dishes and doing a share of tidying up is part of the routine. With many hands, it’s light work!

**Surroundings:** The reserve property is a wonderful place to stay – you’ll wake up to the sounds of howler monkeys and birds, and at night you might hear the distant crash of waves. We are a short walk (10 minutes) from the beach and about 20 minutes walk from the centre of Ojochal village. In Ojochal, you can find a few small supermarkets, restaurants, and pharmacies if you need any extras. The station has a security gate and is very safe, but we do lock up at night for everyone’s peace of mind.

## A Week in the Life of a Volunteer

Wondering what your schedule might look like? Volunteers in Playa Tortuga are expected to help out **6 days per week, ~6 hours per day** on average. We usually rotate tasks so everyone gets rest and variety. Here’s an *example of a typical week* during turtle season (actual activities and days may vary):

- **Monday: Morning:** Arrival and orientation (if it’s your first day). Meet the team, tour the reserve, settle into the accommodation. In the afternoon, get an introduction to the sea turtle programme – learn how to record data and what to do on patrol. *Evening:* Free time to relax after your journey (no patrol on your first night). Enjoy a welcome dinner with the group.
- **Tuesday: Morning:** Beach clean-up and hatchery check at Playa Tortuga. You’ll help remove driftwood and check if any nests have hatched overnight. *Afternoon:* Assist in the Butterfly Garden – learn how to handle butterfly

specimens and maintain host plants. *Evening: Turtle Night Patrol* – Head out at around 8 pm for a 4-hour beach patrol with a small team. Keep your eyes peeled for turtle tracks! (Volunteers rotate patrol nights, so you might patrol every other night to allow rest.)

- **Wednesday:** *Morning:* After a late patrol, you can sleep in. Late morning, join a **mammal tracking hike** to set camera traps in the forest – look for animal footprints and learn about the local wildlife. *Afternoon:* Free time – take a dip in the river, read a book, or nap in a hammock. *Evening:* Tonight might be a **Snake & Frog Night Walk** in the reserve forest. With flashlights and guides, you'll see the forest's nocturnal life.
- **Thursday:** *Morning:* Help out in the tree nursery or with an environmental education activity – perhaps visiting the local school to assist our staff in a conservation workshop. *Afternoon:* **Bird monitoring** session – join the team at 4 pm to count scarlet macaws at a known roosting spot by the beach. It's a stunning sight! *Evening: Turtle Hatchery Duty* – You'll take an early night, then do a shift in the hatchery from 4 am to 6 am, watching for any hatchlings emerging (and releasing them if they do). A quiet, peaceful shift under the stars.
- **Friday:** *Morning:* Enjoy a later start after your early hatchery duty. Mid-morning, catch up by entering data – help the biologist transfer notes from the week's patrols and surveys into the computer database. *Afternoon:* Maintenance task – volunteers might help repair a section of trail, paint a sign, or tidy the station. *Evening:* Another **Turtle Patrol** for those on the rota (if you didn't patrol Tuesday, you go tonight). Others have a free evening – maybe a movie night or games at the station.
- **Saturday:** This is usually the **day off** for volunteers. After a busy week, today is yours to relax or explore. Options abound: you could go on a day trip (perhaps a waterfall hike or a surfing lesson at a nearby beach), or just chill at the reserve. We often organise an optional group outing, like visiting the **Uvita farmers' market** or **snorkelling at Marino Ballena National Park** if people are interested.
- **Sunday:** *Morning:* Volunteers often swap duties on Sundays. You might do a **crocodile river survey** if one is scheduled (typically every other Sunday evening). Alternatively, Sunday could be your free day if you took Saturday to work – it's flexible. *Afternoon:* Prepare for any new arrivals coming and help clean up the station. *Evening:* A relaxed dinner and sharing stories about the week. If it's the end of your stay, we'll celebrate your contributions and maybe have a bonfire on the beach (weather permitting)!

*Note:* Outside of the July–Dec turtle season, the schedule will focus more on other wildlife projects (crocodile surveys might happen more frequently, and we devote more time to reforestation, community projects, and research on birds, mammals, etc.). Regardless of the time of year, we ensure you have one full day off each week to recharge and enjoy Costa Rica. We keep the work meaningful but balanced – conservation is a marathon, not a sprint!

## What's Included & What's Not

We want to be transparent about what is provided as part of your volunteer contribution, and what extra costs you'll need to cover. **Good news:** most essentials on-site are included!

### What's Included in Your Programme Fee:

- **Accommodation** at the reserve (shared volunteer house lodging).
- **Three meals a day** and basic beverages (filtered water, coffee, tea, juice).
- **On-site project coordination and training** by English-speaking staff and biologists.
- **In-country support** and 24/7 emergency contact during your stay.
- **Use of project equipment and facilities** needed for volunteer work (e.g. research equipment, first aid kits, etc.).
- **Laundry facilities** (once a week use of washing machine).
- **Wi-Fi internet access** at the field station.
- **Training and orientation** on all project activities.
- **A contribution to the project's conservation work** – part of your fee goes directly into funding the research and community programmes you'll be working on.

### What's Not Included (Additional Costs to Budget for):

- **Flights** to and from Costa Rica.
- **Travel to the project site**, but we can assist in arranging this.
- **Travel insurance** (mandatory for all volunteers) – you must arrange your own travel/health insurance before arrival.
- **Visa fees** (if applicable for your nationality) and any airport entry/exit taxes.
- **Personal expenses** such as snacks beyond provided meals, toiletries, extra activities on days off (e.g. tours, restaurant meals, souvenirs).
- **Vaccinations or medical costs** – consult your doctor for recommended vaccines for Costa Rica (e.g. tetanus, Hep A) before travel; any costs for these or medications are on you.
- **COVID-19 related tests or requirements** (if any at the time of travel) – currently not required to enter Costa Rica, but subject to change.

We try to minimise unexpected costs. Essentially, once you arrive at the project, you won't need to spend much unless you choose to travel during free time or buy extra treats. Typical weekly spending for volunteers (for off-site fun or personal items) is modest, but it varies by person.

If you have any questions about what's included, please ask – we want you to arrive confident and well-prepared!

## Travel Advice & Getting There

Planning your journey to Playa Tortuga is part of the adventure. Here's how to get here and some handy travel tips:

### Arriving in Costa Rica:

You should plan to fly into **San José (Juan Santamaría International Airport – SJO)**, which is the capital's main airport. From San José to our project site near Ojochal is roughly **3.5 to 4 hours** travel by road. We will provide detailed directions and support for this journey. If you arrive in Costa Rica early, you can also spend a night or two in San José to rest and explore the city before heading to the project.

### Travel by Bus:

Costa Rica has reliable public buses. The most common way volunteers travel is by the **Tracopa bus** from San José direct to Ojochal (ask for the bus towards “Ojochal por Costanera”). Buses leave San José regularly (several times each day, especially morning). The journey costs around \$10–\$15 and takes about 4–5 hours with rest stops. You'll ride along the scenic Pacific coastal highway. When you reach **Ojochal** (a small roadside stop), it's a short walk or taxi ride to Playa Tortuga. We'll provide you with a simple map and the address in Spanish to show locals if needed. Many taxi drivers at the stop know the reserve (“Playa Tortuga”) and can take you right to our gate for a few dollars if you have heavy luggage.

### Travel by Car/Shuttle:

If you prefer, you can arrange a **private shuttle or taxi** from San José or from the smaller Quepos or Palmar Sur airports. WorkingAbroad can help recommend trusted shuttle services. The cost is higher (around \$150–\$200 for a private transfer) but it's convenient, especially for families or groups. Driving yourself in a rental car is also an option – the roads are paved most of the way. We have parking at the reserve. Having a car can be handy on weekends to explore, but it's by no means necessary as public transport and local taxis work fine.

### Domestic Flight Option:

Another option is to take a short domestic flight from San José to **Palmar Sur (PMZ)** or **Quepos (XQP)**, which are smaller airports nearer to us. From there, you'd take a taxi or bus (~1 hour) to Ojochal. This can save time if you arrive on a tight schedule, but it's generally more expensive and requires coordination. If interested, look up Sansa or Nature Air flights within Costa Rica.

### When You Arrive at the Reserve:

Whether you come by bus or car, once you reach our reserve gates, our staff will be there to welcome you. Usually, volunteers arrive during daylight hours. You'll get a quick tour, meet everyone, and have time to settle in. If you arrive after dark (it happens!), we'll get you settled safely and do the full orientation the next morning.

### Travel Tips:

- **Arrive Early in Costa Rica:** If possible, arrive in Costa Rica a day or two before your project start, especially if coming from far away. This gives you time to rest, get over jet lag, and buffer any flight delays. Plus, you can enjoy a bit of San José or take a day trip (Poás Volcano or La Paz Waterfall Gardens are popular).
- **Cash & Currency:** The local currency is Costa Rican **Colón (CRC)**. It's a good idea to have some colones (or USD, which is widely accepted) for travel. For example, bus tickets and small eateries prefer cash. There are ATMs at the airport and in San José. Near the project, ATMs are less common (there's one in Uvita, 20 minutes away), so withdraw what you'll need beforehand. Small bills are useful.
- **Language:** Spanish is the official language. Many people in tourism speak some English, but learning a few basic Spanish phrases will go a long way and is appreciated by locals. We encourage you to practice – your fellow volunteers and staff will help!
- **Luggage:** You won't need any formal clothes here, so pack light, durable clothing (see the "What to Bring" list). A backpack or duffel is easier to manage than a hard suitcase, especially if you take the bus (since you may have to carry it a short way).
- **Arrival Time at the Project Site:** Volunteers must arrive between 8AM and 2PM, ideally by midday for lunch and orientation.
- **Arrival Day at the Project Site:** Volunteers can arrive on any day from Monday to Saturday, but not on a Sunday.
- **Phone/Sim Card:** If you want local connectivity, you can buy a Costa Rican SIM card at the airport or in San José (Kolbi, Movistar, and Claro are common providers). But with Wi-Fi at the project, it's not strictly necessary unless you plan to use data on the road.

Getting here is generally straightforward. Once you're at the reserve, the lush nature and our team's hospitality will make the journey worth it! If at any point you feel unsure during your travels, we're just a phone call away to assist.

## Entry Requirements

Before you pack your bags, make sure you meet the requirements to enter Costa Rica **and** to join the project:

- **Minimum Age:** Volunteers must be **at least 17 years old**. Younger volunteers **aged 7 yrs upwards are welcome if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian** (or with special permission for certain group programmes). This ensures appropriate supervision for minors. There is **no upper age limit**, as long as you are reasonably fit and young at heart!
- **Passport:** You need a valid passport that **does not expire within 6 months** of your entry date. This is a common requirement for entry into Costa Rica. Please double-check your passport's expiry date.
- **Tourist Visa:** To **volunteer in Costa Rica**, you can enter on a normal **tourist visa** (no special work visa needed since volunteering is unpaid). Citizens of most countries (including UK, EU nations, USA, Canada, Australia, and many others)

**automatically get a 180-day tourist visa stamp** on arrival in Costa Rica. You usually do not need to arrange anything in advance if you are from one of these countries.

- If you are a national of a country that requires a visa in advance, you must obtain the tourist visa before traveling.
- When arriving in Costa Rica, immigration may ask for **proof of onward travel** (an exit ticket).
- **Travel Insurance:** Medical/travel insurance is mandatory for all volunteers. You should have a policy that covers emergency medical treatment, trip interruption, and if possible, volunteer activities (most standard travel insurance is fine for this project). We will ask for proof of insurance (insurer name and policy number) when you arrive.
- **Health & Vaccinations:** There are no mandatory vaccinations to enter Costa Rica from most countries (except yellow fever if coming from certain African or South American countries – check if applicable to you). However, we **highly recommend** you are up to date on routine vaccines like Tetanus, Hepatitis A, and Typhoid, as you'll be in rural areas.

The above might sound like a lot, but for most volunteers it's just basic travel prep. Essentially: have a valid passport, a flight out, insurance, and be 17 or over. **Always check the latest entry requirements** a few weeks before your trip – we will also update you if there have been any recent changes (for example, due to global health situations or new immigration rules). You can consult Costa Rica's official tourism or immigration website for current info, or ask us.

## What to Bring

Packing smart will help you enjoy the project comfortably. Southern Pacific Costa Rica is a **tropical environment** (hot and humid, with a rainy season), and our activities are mostly outdoors and hands-on. Below is a suggested packing list. Don't worry if you forget something essential – we can often find it locally – but it's best to come prepared.

### Clothing:

- **T-shirts and Light Long Sleeves:** Bring several breathable cotton or quick-dry t-shirts. Long-sleeved shirts (lightweight) are useful for bug protection in evenings.
- **Shorts and Long Pants:** Pack a few pairs of comfortable shorts for day use. Also bring at least one or two pairs of long trousers (light hiking pants or leggings) for field work or to wear at night (protect from mosquitoes). Quick-dry material is ideal since humidity can make clothes slow to dry.
- **Work Clothes:** Expect to get dirty! Bring clothes you don't mind getting muddy, sandy, or stained. For turtle patrols, **dark-coloured clothing** is required (black or dark navy tops and pants) so as not to distract or disorient turtles on the beach.
- **Swimsuit:** Essential for beach time and possibly working with turtles (sometimes releasing hatchlings involves getting a bit wet). A spare swimsuit is nice if you plan to swim often.

- **Rain Gear:** A good **rain poncho** or lightweight rain jacket is a must, especially if you're coming in the rainy season (May–Nov). Ponchos are great because they cover you and your backpack.
- **Footwear:**
  - **Sturdy closed-toe shoes:** Bring **two pairs** if possible. One pair of robust trainers or hiking shoes for jungle trails, and another that can get wet/sandy for night beach patrols (old running shoes or light trekking shoes work well; they might get salty and muddy). Gumboots/wellingtons are provided for really muddy conditions, but not usually needed.
  - **Sandals or flip-flops:** For around the station and town. A pair of sports sandals (like Texas or similar) that strap on can double for walking short distances or shower shoes.
- **Hat & Sunglasses:** A broad-brimmed hat or baseball cap to shield from the sun during midday activities, and sunglasses (UV protection) for the bright beach.
- **Light jacket or hoodie:** It's warm year-round, but occasionally nights can feel cooler (especially if you're tired). A light long-sleeve or hoodie can be cosy in the evening or if we have a breezy night.

#### **Gear and Other Items:**

- **Water Bottle:** *Absolutely essential.* Bring a reusable water bottle (or two) to stay hydrated. We have clean filtered water to refill. Aim for at least a 1-litre capacity.
- **Backpack/Daypack:** A small rucksack (15-25L) to carry your daily gear (water, insect repellent, snacks, notebook, camera) when going to the beach or on hikes.
- **Headlamp or Torch (Flashlight):** *Required for night patrols.* A **headlamp with a red light setting** is ideal (red LED causes less disturbance to turtles and wildlife). If you can't get red, we will provide red cellophane to cover a white light. Don't forget spare batteries or ensure it's charged if rechargeable.
- **Insect Repellent:** Mosquitoes and sandflies are part of the ecosystem. Bring a good repellent. We recommend one that's effective but reef-safe/eco-friendly if possible, because DEET can be harmful especially if it washes into the ocean (and note: **no insect repellent can be worn during turtle patrols** since chemicals harm baby turtles – we rely on clothing for protection on the beach). For general use, something with picaridin or natural citronella can work, or a lower concentration DEET for your ankles etc.
- **Sunscreen:** A high SPF (30 or 50) sunblock. Choose **waterproof** and eco-friendly (reef-safe) if you can, since you'll be in and out of water and we want to protect the ocean. The sun can be intense even on cloudy days.
- **Beach Towel & Toiletries:** Bring a lightweight **beach/travel towel** or sarong that dries quickly (you'll use this daily for showers or ocean dips). For toiletries, stick to biodegradable and eco-friendly products where possible (shampoo, soap, laundry soap) – this helps us keep our impact on the environment low, as all waste water eventually returns to nature. Don't forget personal items like toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, etc. Feminine hygiene products might be less varied here, so bring what you prefer.

- **Personal Medication & First Aid:** If you have prescription meds, bring enough for your trip (and a copy of the prescription). A small personal first aid kit is a good idea – include band-aids, antiseptic wipes/cream, motion sickness pills (if you plan boat trips), pain relievers, antihistamine for any allergic reactions, and rehydration salts (just in case). We do have a first aid kit on site for emergencies, but it's good to have your own basics for minor scrapes or headaches.
- **Binoculars (optional):** If you're a nature enthusiast and have binoculars, bring them! They're very handy for birdwatching and spotting wildlife. We have a couple of old spare pairs at the station, but sharing might limit your viewing.
- **Camera (optional):** You will likely want to capture memories – whether it's a smartphone or a camera, bring something to take photos. If you have a **waterproof camera or GoPro**, that's even better (rain and turtles mean things can get wet). Remember, no flash photography with the turtles though!
- **Entertainment & Down-Time Items:** Life at the reserve is fun but not luxurious – we recommend bringing a few things to enjoy during free time. Ideas: a paperback book or Kindle, a deck of cards, travel board games, a journal, or even a musical instrument if you play (we love a good guitar around the campfire!). There will be evenings with no scheduled activities, so it's nice to have something to do that doesn't involve a screen.
- **Copies of Documents:** Have digital or paper copies of your passport, insurance policy, flight details, and emergency contacts. Just in case.
- **A positive attitude and open mind:** Last but not least! Volunteering can involve challenges like humid weather, bugs, or simple living conditions. Pack a flexible mindset, sense of humor, and willingness to learn – it makes all the difference.

Remember, **less is more** when packing. You'll be living in casual clothes and may end up rotating the same few outfits. Laundry is available weekly, so you don't need a fresh set for every single day. Leave expensive jewellery or anything you'd be heartbroken to lose at home. The atmosphere here is very laid-back – no one cares if you wear the same favourite t-shirt multiple times!

If you forget something crucial, don't panic: we can help you find it locally or lend a spare. For example, we have a stash of work gloves, rain boots, and field gear at the station if needed. And anything you run out of (toothpaste, etc.) can be bought on a trip to town.

## Free Time and Exploring

Volunteering with us is fulfilling, but we also make sure you have time to relax and **enjoy Costa Rica**. You'll typically have one full day off per week (usually a weekend day) plus some downtime most days between activities or in the evenings. The Ojochal area and the broader Osa coast have plenty to offer during your free time:



- **Beach Time & Surfing:** We're a stone's throw from **Playa Tortuga** itself – a quiet beach great for walks and watching the sunset (swimming here is limited due to rip currents, but nearby beaches are safer for a dip). A short bus or taxi ride away is **Playa Ventanas**, a gorgeous beach famous for its sea caves, and **Playa Uvita** further north, which is great for swimming and beginner surfing. If you've ever wanted to try **surfing**, Dominical (about 45 minutes by bus) is a surf town with board rentals and lessons. Even closer, **Playa Hermosa** (20 min away) offers surfing for various levels.
- **Snorkelling & Whale Watching:** The **Marino Ballena National Park** in Uvita is known for the "Whale Tail" sandbar formation. At low tide you can walk out on it – a unique experience. The park is also a prime spot for **whale and dolphin watching tours** (especially August–October for humpback whales). On a day off, you could join a boat tour to see dolphins, whales (in season), and snorkel around coral reefs.
- **Hiking & Waterfalls:** The lush rainforests around us hide some beautiful **waterfalls**. A popular trip is to **Nauyaca Waterfalls** (about 1.5 hours away near Dominical) – truly breathtaking falls you can swim under (requires a half-day hike or horseback ride, usually done as a tour). Closer by, there are smaller local waterfalls like **El Pavón** (a short drive from Ojochal) which is a lovely spot for a refreshing dip in a natural pool.
- **Wildlife Watching:** Consider visiting **Corcovado National Park** for a truly wild experience – it's one of the world's most biodiverse places. It's a bit further (you'd need an overnight trip, via Puerto Jiménez or Drake Bay), but if you have time before or after your volunteering, it's worth it. During your project, you might instead visit the nearby **Mangrove wetlands of Sierpe** or take a guided night walk at a butterfly farm in town – Ojochal has a small one where you can see frogs and insects at night.
- **Local Culture & Cuisine:** Ojochal is actually famed in Costa Rica for its great eateries (it's sometimes called the "culinary capital" of the South Pacific). You can find anything from traditional **sodas** (local restaurants serving casados – rice, beans, plantain, etc.) to pizzerias and even a few fine dining spots opened by expatriates. Treat yourself to a nice dinner out – perhaps try some fresh ceviche or coconut curry. Also, don't miss trying a Churchill (a Costa Rican ice-cream-slushy dessert) or a simple fresh pipa (cold coconut water straight from the coconut).
- **Adventure Activities:** If you're an adrenaline junkie, you can book a **zip-lining tour** through the rainforest canopy, go **horseback riding** on the beach, or rent a kayak/SUP to explore the shoreline. There's a reputable zip-line tour in the

nearby town of Ojochal that takes you flying through the treetops – an exhilarating way to see the jungle!

- **Relax & Recharge:** Free time doesn't have to be go-go-go. You might just enjoy hanging out at the reserve: reading in a hammock, doing a yoga session on the deck (several volunteers are yogis and the setting is peaceful), or having a casual football (soccer) match with local kids. We want you to feel rested as well as productive, so take the downtime you need.

During your welcome orientation, we'll highlight some of these options and help you plan group outings if people are interested. There is a bulletin board at the station where staff and volunteers often post ideas for weekend activities and sign-up sheets so people can join in together. Often volunteers will coordinate among themselves to share taxis or costs for trips on days off.

Costa Rica is a safe country to travel in, and the **pura vida** (pure life) vibe is all about enjoying life slowly and happily. We encourage you to embrace it! Whether it's stargazing on the beach, learning to cook a local dish from our staff, or exploring new places, your free time is a chance to make your experience even richer.

Finally, always let the project coordinator know your plans when you go off-site, even on your day off – it's important we know how to reach you in case plans change (and for safety, we must keep track of who is on site). Usually it's just a formality, and we're happy to give recommendations or help arrange trusted transport for your excursions.

## Testimonials from Past Volunteers

*Hearing from previous volunteers can give you a taste of what's in store. Here are a couple of inspiring quotes from people who joined the Playa Tortuga project:*

**"Releasing baby turtles into the sea at sunrise was magical. Truly one of the most special things I've ever done."**

*– Lucy, solo traveller*

**"Our children said they'd rather be in 100% humidity with no air con than a luxury hotel – says it all!"**

*– The Lea family*

**"I arrived nervous, but within days I felt like part of the team. It changed how I see the world."**

*– Freya, long-term volunteer*

**"Walking through the jungle, seeing monkeys overhead and hearing the waves crash on the beach – pure magic."**

*– Beth, family volunteer*

**"The highlight of my trip was watching capuchins playing just metres away. That moment stays with you."**

– Scott, solo volunteer

We hope their words excite you as much as they do us. Every volunteer leaves with their own memories and stories – and we look forward to yours joining these happy tales!

## How to Book Your Volunteer Trip

Ready to take the next step and join the Playa Tortuga Volunteer Programme? Booking your placement is easy and we're here to help at every stage. Follow these simple steps to secure your spot:

- 1. Choose Your Dates:** Decide when and how long you'd like to volunteer. Turtle season (July–December) is the most popular time, especially if you want to see hatchlings. We offer placements year-round, starting any week, with a **1-week minimum** (you can join from 1 to 12 weeks). Check the [available start dates](#) on our website.
- 2. Book Online or Contact Us:** [Visit our WorkingAbroad Playa Tortuga project page](#) to make your booking. You can fill out the application form online – it will ask for your details, chosen dates, and any questions or requirements you have. If you prefer, you can also email or call us (see contact details below) to reserve your place or ask anything before booking. We're happy to talk through the options with you.
- 3. Confirmation & Deposit:** Once we receive your application, we will confirm availability for your dates (usually within 1-2 business days). To secure your placement, you'll need to pay a **deposit** (a part of the total fee). This can be done via our secure online payment system. The deposit is usually £195 (or equivalent), but check the current details on our site. This deposit ensures your spot is saved. We'll send you a confirmation email and receipt.
- 4. Pre-departure Preparation:** After confirmation, the remaining balance of your programme fee will be due 30 days before your start date (or immediately if you're booking last-minute within 1 month). Once you've paid in full, we will send you a comprehensive **Volunteer Handbook** and pre-departure pack (with all these details and more). Our team will be in touch to assist with any logistics like travel planning, insurance, or any questions you might think of. Don't hesitate to reach out at any point – we're here to help make your preparations as smooth as possible.
- 5. Join the Project:** Pack your bags, board your flight, and get ready for an incredible journey! We'll coordinate to meet you in Costa Rica as arranged. From the moment you land to the moment you finish, we'll be there to support you. During your volunteer experience, feel free to contact WorkingAbroad (via email/phone) if you need any assistance – though our on-site team will likely cover everything. After your project, we'd love to hear your feedback and see your photos – you'll officially be part of the WorkingAbroad alumni family, contributing to conservation worldwide.

<https://www.workingabroad.com/projects/playa-tortuga-conservation-volunteer-project-costa-rica/>

^^ You can **Book your Playa Tortuga volunteer experience here**. (If clicking doesn't work, just copy-paste the link into your browser.)

**Contact Email:** If you have any questions before booking, drop us a line at [info@workingabroad.com](mailto:info@workingabroad.com). We typically respond within 24 hours on weekdays. We can clarify any details about the project, costs, or travel – no question is too small.

**Phone (UK office):** You can call us at **+44 (0)1273 479 047** if you'd like to speak to a coordinator directly. We're in the office Monday–Friday during normal business hours (UK time).

We're excited to help you arrange this meaningful adventure. Booking with WorkingAbroad is flexible and secure – and remember, as a not-for-profit, our project fees go toward supporting the programme and local conservation efforts.

Once booked, we'll count down the days with you until you arrive in Costa Rica. Get ready for an experience that not only contributes to crucial conservation work but also leaves you with lifelong memories and new friends.

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*Thank you for reading the Playa Tortuga Volunteer Info Pack. We hope it has answered your questions and ignited your excitement. By choosing to volunteer with us, you are making a positive impact for sea turtles, wildlife, and the community in Costa Rica. We truly appreciate your support and enthusiasm.*

**We look forward to welcoming you to Playa Tortuga soon – tu aventura te espera!**  
(your adventure awaits!)

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*WorkingAbroad Projects – Established 2002*

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**Email:** [info@workingabroad.com](mailto:info@workingabroad.com)

**Tel (UK):** +44 (0)1273 479 047

*“Conservation is not a spectator sport – thank you for getting involved!”*

