



# Reserva Playa Tortuga Volunteer Manual 2018

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PROGRAMA de CONSERVACIÓN



de TORTUGAS MARINAS



Fundación para la Investigación y Conservación de Playa Tortuga • Cédula Jurídica: 3-006-629328  
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# About Us

*Reserva Playa Tortuga is a non-profit biological research and education center formed by community members ("citizen scientists") and Costa Rican scientists to create a culture of environmental conservation in Costa Rica. We work with the local communities, national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and individuals to promote environmental awareness and conservation actions in favor of protection of natural resources and the creation/re-creation of intact coastal marine environments, and the development of responsible ecological tourism.*

# Our Location

We are located just 3.5 hours from San José, in Ojochal de Osa on the southern Pacific coast of Costa Rica. The reserve offers a unique environment to researchers and volunteers. Reserva Playa Tortuga is located in tropical rainforest, including habitats such as Pasture, Swamp, Estuary, Coral reefs, Sand beach, Rocky beach, Riparian forest, Mangrove forest, Regenerating forest and Secondary forest. We are situated at the mouth of the Térraba River, which is a part of The Térraba-Sierpe National wetlands (30,654 ha), one of the largest and most important wetlands in Central America and also a Ramsar Site (Ramsar Convention - The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance). Additionally, Ojochal is just outside of Marino Ballena National Park.

*Our coordinates are: WGS84 projection: North: 9°04'26.23" West: 83°39'31.39"*



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# Volunteer Projects

Projects run all year round,  
*except for the sea turtle program, which runs from July to January only.*

## Sea Turtle Conservation Program



On the South Pacific beaches of Osa Costa Rica there are four potential species of sea turtles which can be seen nesting at different times of the year Olive Ridley: (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*), Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). **They are all in danger of extinction.** Playa Tortuga beach is an Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) nesting beach although it is possible that other species occasionally arrive.

**The nesting period extends from July to December, with the peak of nesting in the months of September and October,** during this period it is possible to observe an individual, every other night, sometimes two or three.

In the past two seasons we have successfully protected over 140 nests and released 5,000 plus hatchlings, each nest contains on average 100 eggs. Most nests are moved to the nursery/hatchery where they are observed and protected 24/7. In the hatchery important data about the biology of the turtle's nests is gathered, such as the incubation period, nest temperature and how this influences the sex of the hatchlings, as well as observing environmental factors such as precipitation and physical environmental factors.



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## Training:

As part of our volunteering with sea turtles program, you will have the opportunity to learn about the biology of sea turtles, especially the Olive Ridley or 'Lora' (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) which is the most common on Playa Tortuga. You will see adults, babies and eggs, and learn about its life cycle. *You will be part of a serious scientific research project, which provides important data for the conservation of sea turtles.*

Upon arrival, sea turtle volunteers receive training about the research project, how to use the equipment, as well as proper behavior in the field. The volunteer groups will always be working with experienced staff member, who will be able to show volunteers proper scientific methods for working with sea turtles, hatchery work, handling nesting females, eggs and data collection.

## Responsibilities:

- Care and protection of Hatchery and Camp
- Cleaning and maintenance of Playa Tortuga
- Assist Project Biologist with turtle data collection, monitoring (tagging) and management (including hatchling releases)
- Relocation of eggs to hatchery or safe location on the beach. This is done when it is determined that eggs are threatened by beach erosion, tides, excessive driftwood or poachers.
- Night patrols on the Beach -- Turtle and poacher monitoring.



## What to do when you encounter a turtle:

- When you first see a turtle, if it is still making its way up the beach, or returning to the ocean, you need to avoid noises or movements that would startle it.
- NO flash photography -- it is forbidden. (Flash photography is ONLY used under special permission for use in training and education.)
- Keep away from the turtle until you're with a staff member. Please be quiet and do not use your flashlight.
- Once the turtle has chosen her nest site it will be the responsibility of the patrol leader/Staff to approach the turtle and decide when it is safe to start work.



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## Use of light:

- The protocol for the region of Central America is to only use a red light when patrolling the beaches. *Exceptions:* Emergencies (e.g. when you need to send signals to the other people on patrol); you have been instructed to use your white light; or you are looking for poachers.

## Important rules while you are working on the beach:

- Never take a picture of the turtles using a flash or other artificial lights
- Never walk or stand in front of a turtle.
- Never shine a flashlight in a turtle's face.
- Never allow strangers to join the patrol and don't give any information about the project/turtles.
- Never drink before you go on duty and never arrive for patrol drunk (*Reserva Playa Tortuga reserves the right to remove you from the project without refund if this happens*).
- No use of illegal drugs will be tolerated – (*Reserva Playa Tortuga reserves the right to remove you from the project without refund if this happens*).
- Always be ready at least 15 minutes early for patrol.
- If you encounter poachers, report it to RPT staff, never deal with them by yourself.
- If you encounter a sea turtle in the daytime photos are allowed, however respect the turtle at all times.
- Always handle egg bags as gently as possible (the more gentle you are with the eggs, the higher hatch rate).
- **Never use insect repellent or perfume while working with the turtles or their eggs.**
- Properly dispose of food and garbage from the hatchery. Otherwise this will attract ants, dogs, raccoons and other animals.



## Working Hours:

- RPT requires that you volunteer 5.5 days for every week you stay and 6 hours each day. Volunteers may choose to work more hours and may select which projects they would prefer to work on. Spaces are limited, especially on the turtle project, no more than 8 people may be patrolling at once (Couples may not always be able to work together).
- Work will be split into two main tasks; Night patrols and Hatchery duty.
- Night Patrol: The beach is 1.4km and is divided into sectors Patrol shifts will be approx. 3 hours long and are done according to the tides.



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## Environmental Education & Outreach Program



It is essential for future generations to understand the importance of environmental conservation and natural resources management. The children of Osa are the future heirs of the natural resources that we are working to preserve today. As such, we consider the school community of the Grande de Térraba Circuit of major importance with regard to this goal.

This is one of the main missions of the Reserve, to actively educate and involve the student community throughout this area. To this end, we have created the "Era Verde" project, which consists of a one-year module curriculum based on the different conservation and natural resource management projects in which Reserva Playa Tortuga is currently working. We work with some schools such as Escuela Tortuga, Escuela Punta Mala, Escuela Ballena, Escuela El Valle del Diquis, etc. through conferences, guided tours, excursions, among others. Volunteers will have the opportunity to be part of the workshops, prepare materials, make crafts, drive and work with the children of the schools during the workshops.

The outreach program seeks to project the work of Reserva Playa Tortuga with neighboring communities and abroad through activities that allow different audiences to reach. Currently Reserva Playa Tortuga is an active member of the local "Bandera Azul Ecológica" committees from Ojochal and Playa Ventanas, among others.

Some of the activities undertaken during the year are:

- Cleaning of the Balso River
- Playa Tortuga and Playa Ventanas cleaning
- Festival de Tortugas Marinas
- Summer camp, etc.



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# The Butterfly Garden



The Butterfly Garden of RPT is for educational purposes and seeks to be a tool for the teaching-learning process in students, allowing to contextualize the curriculum issued by the Ministry of Public Education, which allows teaching about concepts such as the life cycle of insects, the ecological role they play in nature and the biological and cultural relationships they maintain.

Some of the native species of butterflies found here are: *Siproeta stelenes*, *Caligo brasiliensis*, *Heliconius ismenius*, *Morpho helenor*, among others.

In recent years, it has been an open classroom meeting the conditions necessary to perform experiments on biology, ecology and ethology, such as: behavior, territoriality, longevity and courtship, for their science works and scientific fairs.

Some of the activities carried out by the volunteers are:

- Activities with students
- Collection and identification of butterflies
- Transplant of host plants
- Transfer of pupae and larvae.
- Data collection in the laboratory



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# Mammal Inventory Program



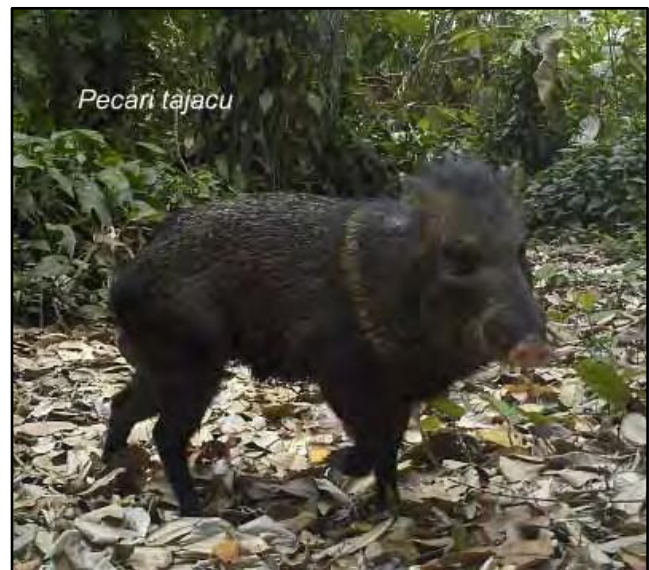
Within the Reserva, there are more than 11 species of mammals - the most common being raccoons, coatis, kinkajous, weasels, river otters, tayra and monkeys.

The mammals are important for the forest dynamic balance, and by getting data on their behavior (diet) and local movements, it offers information that can be used in reforestation plans for the coastal area to establish Biological Corridors.

Capuchin monkeys are easy to find into the Reserva forest. Anteaters, opossums, and sloths are also common in the area but a bit harder to observe.

There is also evidence of an Ocelot (detected by trail cameras) in the Balso River!

The trail cameras are an excellent tool to determinate the presence and abundance of mammals in the area.



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# Crocodilian Monitoring Program



The main objective of this study is to collect real-time information about the Crocodilians at the Reserve area: their distribution, relationship with the environment and the human impact on the ecosystem. We are doing an initial profile of the

population, in order to help the conservation and management of this species by adding new information about its current status in the South Pacific of Costa Rica.

## Methodology:

Because it is an initial study, the research consists of nocturnal monitoring two times per week (depending of the tide) where the eyes of the animals will be detected with flashlights. We count the number of animals and mark their locations with GPS. Small-sized individuals (less than 1 meter) will be captured to determine the species, actual size, sex, and health condition. Those animals will be tagged by cutting a little notch in the tail scales and released.

## Equipment:

Flash lights, kayaks, leather gloves, tape, GPS, camera.



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# Volunteer Rates

1 Week -- \$300	7 Weeks -- \$1960
2 Weeks -- \$600	8 Weeks -- \$2240
3 Weeks -- \$900	9 Weeks -- \$2520
4 Weeks -- \$1200	10 Weeks -- \$2800
5 Weeks -- \$1400	11 Weeks -- \$3080
6 Weeks -- \$1680	12 Weeks -- \$3360

One-day volunteers do not stay in a room at RPT, but they can join all the projects with a payment/donation of \$15 per day/night patrol. Food and transportation from and to RPT are not included.

## Rules & Requirements

Our area is very safe, though we advise taking normal traveler's precautions. Upon your arrival to RPT, staff will brief you on the area and station rules. The RPT volunteer station is protected by a fence and 24/7 video cameras. All permanent staff is certified in CPR and First Aid.

PLEASE REMEMBER **YOU MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE TO VOLUNTEER** AT RESERVA PLAYA TORTUGA. (SPECIAL PERMISSION MAY BE GRANTED TO UNDERAGE AGE 13+ VOLUNTEERS ACCOMPANIED BY GUARDIAN).

*Associated Documents that will be sent to you upon completion of application and acceptance into Volunteer Program:*

1. Volunteer Emergency Contact Form
2. Waiver and Release of Liability for Volunteers/Tourist
3. Reserva Playa Tortuga Field Station Rules

### **Travel/Medical/Accident Insurance:**

In order to participate in our program, you should travel with your own travel insurance that will provide medical and accident assistance throughout the entirety of your trip.



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# What's Included & What To Bring

You will be provided with linens (sheets), three meals a day, snacks, and non-alcoholic drinks. We have Wi-Fi internet access, so you may wish to bring your laptop. Each week volunteers are given one free use of washing machine and use of the solar drying tent.

## PLEASE BRING:

1. Good-quality poncho (we like ponchos as they are not too hot), or a rain jacket
2. BPA-Free or Stainless Steel Water Bottle (at least 2)
3. Alarm clock
4. Waterproof watch
5. Binoculars (if you have them – good ones, preferably waterproof)
6. Flashlight and **LED head lamps w/red light** are ideal. We have chargers for ones that use re-chargeable batteries
7. Quick drying clothing for a warm/hot tropical climate (cotton can take a long time to dry).  
*Bring clothes that you are not worried about ruining - you will get dirty!*
8. Black or dark-colored clothes for night time beach patrols/walks (**During the turtle season, the use of dark clothes is required to participate on night patrols**)
9. Several t-shirts, shorts, light long pants w/pockets, light long-sleeve shirt  
(Enough clothes for one week. Remember, we have a washer.)
10. Two pairs of sturdy shoes for walking the beach at night (water shoes work great for the beach walks) and hiking in the area (bulky hiking boots are not necessary) day hikers, rubber boots, or tennis shoes.
11. Sandals (good ones!), rubber boots and/or water shoes
12. Swimsuit(s)
13. Insect repellent (not to be used on the beach with turtles!)
14. Beach/Bath towels
15. Waterproof sunscreen
16. Biodegradable shampoo, soaps, personal toiletries (be kind to Costa Rica's water system)
17. Sunglasses
18. Camera (waterproof is always good)
19. Things to donate to local schools and/or our community education center are welcome!
20. International calling cards are available in local stores or cell phone rental in the airport.
21. Two photocopies of your passport
22. Entertainment: books, games, music, guitar, paints, soccer balls, etc.
23. Students and researchers who come to do their own investigations should bring their own laptop or device to store information of their researches.



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# Food & Lodging

All food and lodging is included in the volunteer fee. Meals will be prepared with the assistance of the volunteer coordinator. Available food may include rice and beans, tortillas, salads, chicken, fish, beef, pastas, soups, cereals, sandwiches, cheese, fruits, veggies and fresh tropical juices.

Additionally, volunteers are responsible for keeping the kitchen, bathrooms and dorm rooms clean and orderly.



Reserva Playa Tortuga can accommodate groups of up to 15 people. We have a handicap-accessible room, one room with a queen bed, another room has a bunk with a single and a full bed, while all other rooms are singles. All rooms are spacious with quality mattresses and fans. Each room has storage, drawers and screens in the windows to keep out the bugs. All rooms are available on first-come, first-serve basis.

The turtle beach camp is equipped with sleeping platforms covered with mosquito nets for nights you may stay at the camp.



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# How To Get Here

Reserva Playa Tortuga is located in Ojochal, just 3.5 hours from San José. Please arrange to fly into SJO (San José Costa Rica's International Airport). You may also travel to RPT from Liberia's International Airport but you will have to take a second hop flight to either Quepos or Palmar Sur and arrange private transport or take a bus to RPT.

## Airlines offering direct flights to Costa Rica

Aeromexico	Copa Delta	Southwest
Air Canada	Edelweiss Air	Spirit Air
Air Panama	Frontier	TACA/LACSA
Alaska Airlines	Iberia	Thomson
American Airlines	Interjet	United
Avianca	JetBlue	US Airways
British Airways	KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Volaris
Continental		

There are options for all budgets to travel to RPT once in Costa Rica – bus, taxi, private transfer, or short hop flight by air.

***Note: RPT does not book ground, air travel or hotels for volunteers.***

### **By bus to the reserve:**

From the airport you have to take a taxi (\$35 aprox cost) to the TRACOPA bus station in San José, there are buses going to Ojochal and depart almost every hour since 6am, Ojochal is not a final destination so when you buy the ticket you must tell them that you are going to Ojochal by Costanera.

The bus does two rest stops: one lasts 5min, and other lasts 30min in Uvita. When you get back on the bus after this 2nd stop, tell the driver you are getting off in Ojochal. The bus drive from Uvita to Ojochal takes about 10 mins.

When you arrive in Ojochal at the bus stop, walk east (the same direction in which you were heading on the bus) until you pass the green sign for Playa Tortuga. Immediately after the bridge, take the dirt road on your right (marked with a sign for Reserva Playa Tortuga) until you see the main gate and another sign for Reserva Playa Tortuga. The reserve is less than a 10-minute walk from the bus stop.

**If you arrive to the airport after 3 pm, you must spend the night in San José and travel to Ojochal the next day.**



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### Tracopa Bus Schedule - Leaving San Jose:

(These buses pass by Ojochal)

6:30am - Golfito

7:30am - Panamá

10:15am - Paso Canoas

11:00am - Laurel

12:15pm - San Vito

1:05pm - Paso Canoas

2:00pm - Paso Canoas

3:30pm - Golfito

4:30pm - Paso Canoas

6:40pm - Paso Canoas

### Shuttle services:

Monkeyridecr.com - +506 2787-0454

Transfers MyC - +506 87180004

Costa Rica Travel One - +506 2582-0461

## Free Time

During your free time, there are many tours and activities to choose from, such as surf lessons, horseback riding, zip line tours, photography lessons, hiking, waterfalls, local beaches, snorkeling and diving.

Ojochal also has many restaurants, a supermarket, pulperias, shops and bars in walking distance of the Reserva.

There are also buses to Uvita, Dominical, Quepos and to the rest of Costa Rica and Panamá (we are 2.5 hours from the border). Visit [www.uvita.info](http://www.uvita.info) for more information on things to see and do.

Exótica / Restaurante (506) 2786 5050	Hotel El Castillo / Restaurante (506)2786-5543	Osa Canopy Tour 8884 1237
Hotel Villas Gaia / Restaurante (506) 8382-8240	The Bamboo Room / Restaurante (506) 2786 5295	Kokopelli Wildlife Tour 8897 1678
Mama e Papa / Restaurante (506) 2786-5336	Fusión / Restaurante 2786 5152	Bodhi Surf School 2743 8453



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# How To Apply

Please visit our website to view our booking calendar to see if we have availability for the dates you are interested in coming to volunteer. Then, use the contact form to email us. Let us know what dates you are interested in and we will send you an application form.



## Visa information:

To work as a volunteer at the project, you only need a tourist visa. Most North American and European nationals automatically receive a ninety-day visa upon entering the country and are not required to obtain one in advance.

Nationals from several South American countries, however, are required to obtain a tourist visa from the Costa Rican embassy in their country prior to arrival.

Upon departing your home country, or upon entering Costa Rica, it is very possible that airline or immigration officials will ask you to present proof of your exit ticket out of Costa Rica. If you have no return ticket, you will be required to obtain a ticket to another country.

**Please make sure your passport is valid throughout your entire stay in Costa Rica!**



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