



***RESERVA PLAYA TORTUGA
VOLUNTEER MANUAL***



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.

Where are we? How to get here?

Reserva Playa Tortuga is located just 3.5 hours from San Jose, in Ojochal de Osa on the Southern Pacific Coast of Costa Rica. 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. 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



How to get to the Reserve by bus?

- 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 from 6 am. 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 5 min, and other lasts 30 min in Uvita. When you get back on the bus after the 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.

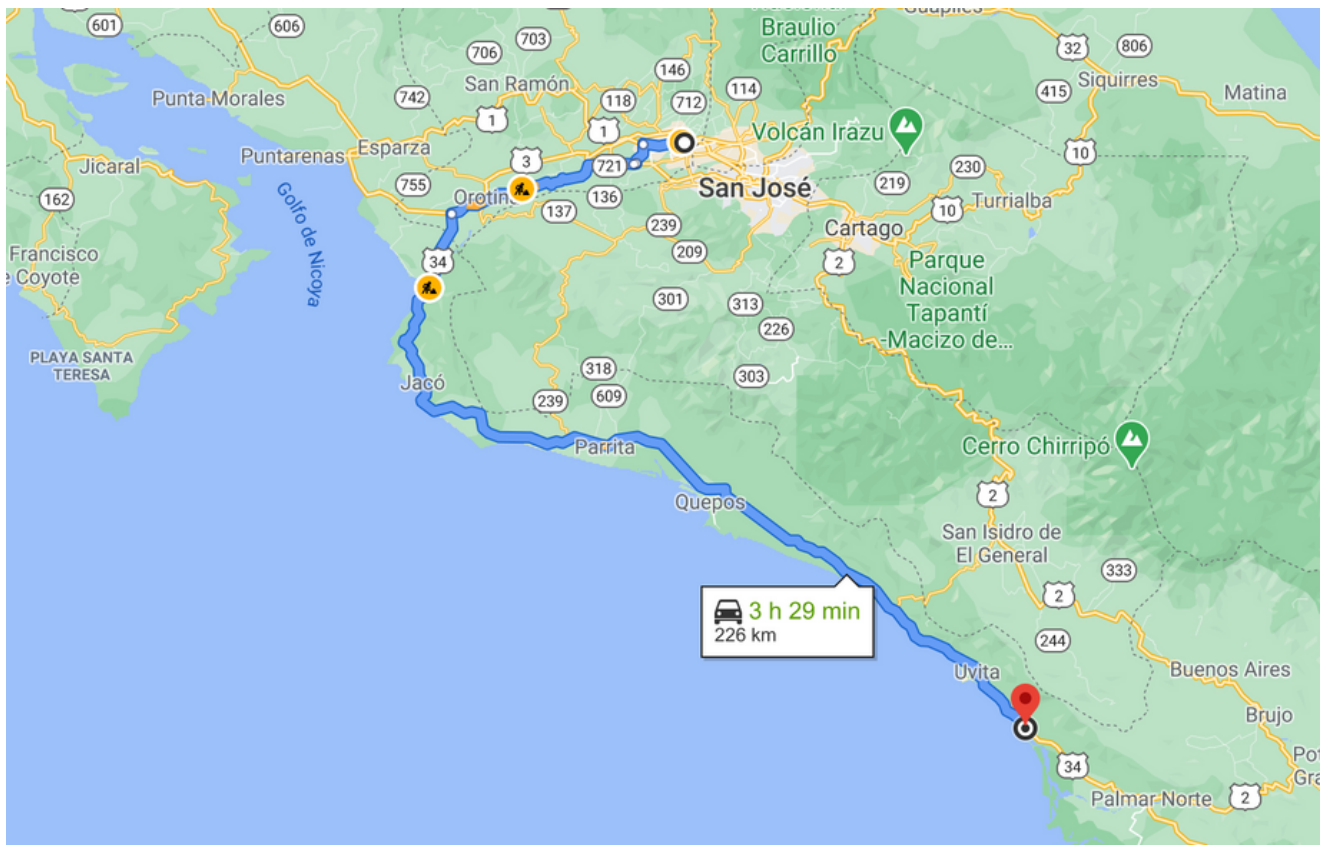
If you arrive to the airport after 3 pm, you must spend the night in San José and travel to Ojochal the next day.

To check updated information about bus schedule please visit:
www.tracopacr.com

How to get to the Reserve by private transport?

Transfers M y C

Mónica Ramírez
+506 70186248
transfersmyc@gmail.com



OUR PROJECTS

- Projects run all year round, except for the Sea Turtle Program, which runs from July to January only.
- RPT requires that you volunteer 6 days for every week you stay and 6 hours each day.
- The projects are activities under research protocols, so participation in them will depend on the work plan of the scientific team.

Sea Turtle Conservation Program

On the South Pacific beaches of Osa Costa Rica there are three potential species of sea turtles which can be seen nesting at different times of the year: Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*) and Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*). They are all in danger of extinction.

Playa Tortuga is primarily an Olive Ridley turtle nesting beach (although it is possible that other species occasionally arrive), and thanks to the efforts of the Reserve, was officially declared a nesting beach in 2014.

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 turtle nesting every other night, and sometimes up to two or three at a time.



Due to an inherent poaching threat, most nests are moved to the Reserve's protected nursery/hatchery where staff and volunteers monitor and observe the area 24/7.

In the hatchery, important data about the biology of the turtles' 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. We have released so far, since 2009, more than 50.000 baby turtles.

Volunteer duties

- **Care and protection of Hatchery.**
- **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.**



Crocodylian Monitoring Program

The main objective of this study is to collect real-time information about the Crocodylians at the Térraba river: 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.



The research consists of nocturnal expeditions on boat one night every two weeks. In average each trip takes around 5 to 7 hours.

The work with the crocodylians (American crocodile or Caiman) consists in eyes counting by use of a spotlight to determinate de density of the population. The second part is the capture of individuals where the staff will be in charge of manipulate the animal and teach the volunteers how to take the morphometrical data as total length, body girth, etc. For security, the volunteers that join this project will be selected by the main biologist on the volunteer performance.



Wildlife Monitoring

Birds

The birds watching walks are part of the reserve fauna inventories. By keeping an updated record of the species allows to the coming researchers or volunteers of the reserve to have fresh data of the number of birds that visit our forest and surrounding areas.



The walks are performed 2 or 3 times per week, in the morning and evenings. The volunteers join the researchers and learn how to identify and use apps as EBIRD and MERLIN as part of the experience.

As a complement of the general birds inventory, the volunteers help doing the monitoring of the resident population of the Scarlet Macaws twice a week, on the beach or forest, where they must collect information about the number of individuals and their location.



Mammals

Reserva Playa Tortuga has about 15 species of medium-sized mammals, including ocelots, coatis, raccoons and tayras. Many of these species are very elusive due to their habits. In order to register these, the volunteers together with RPT staff search for evidence of mammalian activity in the forest (footprints, burrows, feces, etc.). Once a place is found, camera traps are placed to obtain captures of the animals. The cameras are checked and their information is processed every week.

Monkeys

In 2009, we started recording the presence of one monkey species, the Capuchin monkey (*Cebus imitator*) in the reserve, and by 2015 we started to observe Howler monkeys (*Alouatta palliata*) for the very first time in our forest. For that reason, we started to carry out monkey's surveys twice a week, along the reserve's forest, looking for the monkey troops.



Once we detect one of the species, we perform observations including number of individuals, males or females, if they are carrying babies or not, their behavior, if they are resting, eating (type of food eaten), passing by, tree species that they use and so on. We also mark the GPS location of the troop.

The data collected helps us to determine how many monkeys there are, and the size of each troop in the forest, which areas they use and which resources, and over time, we will be able to monitor if we detect any behavioral changes.

Bats

Costa Rica has 114 species of bats. Among these is a very specific group that modifies the leaves of plants for their bedrooms. These species are extremely important in the tropics as they are the most important pollinators, even more than birds.

RPT conducts a monitoring in the forest in search of the bat houses.

Once located, the volunteers mark them with GPS, count how many individuals there are and then the houses are followed until the bats are no longer seen.

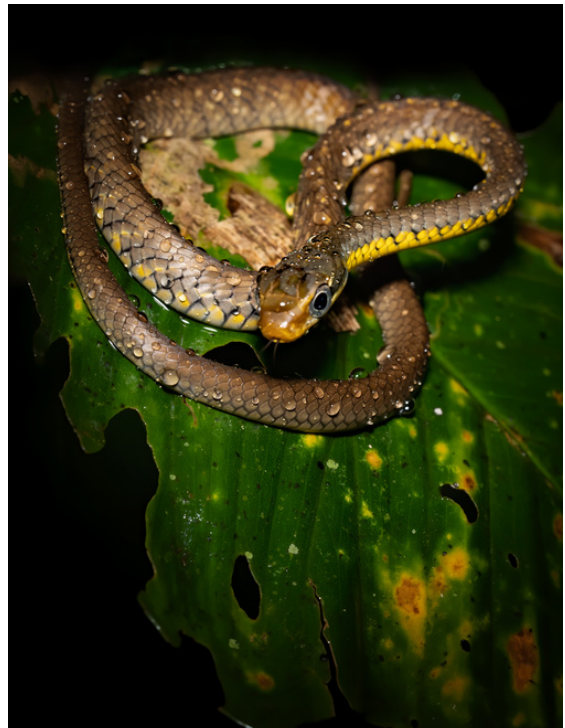
This provides important information on the use of habitat and the timing of the activity of bats within the tropical forest.



Reptiles (Snakes) & Amphibians

Costa Rica has more than 140 snakes species, and all have an important role in the ecosystem. The resident species of the reserve and their relation with the habitat are part of our main objectives: to protect key species, top predators that keep the balance.

1 or 2 nights per week walks at the forest are performed by the reserve team looking for the snakes. Prior to capture the animal, its location and habitat information are collected by the volunteers.



The animal manipulation and capture is done by the staff. The snakes are taken to the station where morphometrical data is collected before releasing the animal.

During the snakes night walks the team will record the amphibians species too, with the purpose of have a list of the frogs, salamanders and other amphibians that inhabit our forest. This information it's important for future research related with this group.



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 Large Terraba Circuit is of major importance with regard to this goal.

Outreach

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
- Summer Camp, etc.

Butterfly Garden

The Butterfly Garden has educational purposes and seeks to be a tool for the teaching-learning process in students, 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.



In recent years it has been an open classroom, fulfilling the necessary conditions 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:

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



REQUIREMENTS

Admission to the project

- Please remember you must be at least 18 years old to volunteer at Reserva Playa Tortuga. Special permission may be granted to underage 13+ volunteers accompanied by guardian.
- 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.

If you meet all the requirements above you can visit our website and start your application as a volunteer through our online form:

<https://rptojochal.typeform.com/to/OH7ne4>



Entry to the country

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 likely 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

Useful links to check updated information about requirements to entry Costa Rica according to your country.

- <https://www.migracion.go.cr>
- <https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr>
- <https://www.visitcostarica.com>

RATES

1 Week \$400
2 Weeks \$800
3 Weeks \$1200
4 Weeks \$1600
5 Weeks \$2000
6 Weeks \$2400

7 Weeks \$2800
8 Weeks \$3200
9 Weeks \$3600
10 Weeks \$4000
11 Weeks \$4400
12 Weeks \$4800

*Get 10% discount by staying 5 weeks or longer



ONE DAY VOLUNTEERS

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.



LODGING

All food and lodging is included in the volunteer fee. The reserve has a cook for lunch from Monday to Friday. Breakfasts and dinners will be prepared by the volunteers.

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.

All rooms are spacious with quality mattresses and fans. Each room has storage, drawers and screens in the windows to keep out the bugs. RPT provides the bedding. All rooms are available on first-come, first-serve basis.



FIELD STATION RULES

Inside the Reserve

- The Gates will be closed at 9:00pm for volunteers and interns. It is OK to be out of the station after 9:00pm only if you are in a work activity.
- The time to use the kitchen to prepare your dinner is from 5:00pm to 8:00pm. The kitchen should be clean and tidy after use.
- Regarding late arrivals or absences for activities without justification:
 - Each late arrival or absence without justification is equivalent to a verbal warning. Every third verbal warning will result in an admonition and after two admonitions the volunteer or intern must leave the project.
- Possession or consumption of alcohol or drugs at the station:
 - Possession of alcohol or drugs warrants an admonition; with two admonitions the volunteer or intern must leave the project.
- The consumption of alcohol or drugs merits direct expulsion from the project.
- Quiet hours are from 9:00pm to 6:00am -except during sea turtle project (you will be briefed on hrs):
 - Breaking the hours of silence, warrants a verbal warning every third verbal warning means an admonition. With two admonitions, the volunteer or intern must leave the project.
- Smoking inside the reserve is totally prohibited.

Money will not be reimbursed to volunteers or interns who are expelled from the project.

FIELD STATION RULES

General Rules

- Absolutely NO swimming or surfing in the ocean while working on RPT Projects (due to dangerous waves and rip currents). You may swim/surf during free time at YOUR OWN RISK- Reserva Playa Tortuga assumes no liability.
- No walking on trails or other parts of RPT alone. When leaving the Reserve for any reason, you must advise the coordinator, resident biologist or station manager where you are going and your estimated return time.
- Do not handle snakes or other wild animals.
- Wear closed shoes after sundown. Poisonous snakes, spiders, scorpions are rarely seen, but they do live in the area.
- You are welcome to use the books in the Station library, but you must sign them out and replace them in their proper order.
- Report any maintenance needs or other problems with the facilities.
- Please do not eat in the bedrooms or leave open food wrappers/garbage.
- Place recyclables in their appropriate receptacles at the RPT station (cans, glass, plastic and organic waste).
- Please use only biodegradable soaps and bathing products.
- Use of washer and dryer should be limited to 1 day per week.
- Remove dirty boots or shoes before entering the buildings.
- Please return all RPT equipment clean and in good condition- You will be charged for lost or damaged RPT equipment.
- Conserve energy and turn off lights when not in use.
- Researchers and resident biologists must obtain research permits in advance from RPT.
- If a room key is lost there is a \$20.00 charge.
- Please let the RPT staff know if you need to store valuables or if you need anything else.
- RPT is not responsible for lost or stolen personal items.

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

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

<https://rptojochal.typeform.com/to/OH7ne4>



WHAT TO BRING?

- Good-quality poncho (we like ponchos as they are not too hot), or a rain jacket.
- BPA-Free or Stainless Steel Water Bottle (at least 2).
- Binoculars (if you have them – good ones, preferably waterproof).
- Flashlight and LED head lamps w/red light are idea. 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!
- 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)
- Several t-shirts, shorts, light long pants w/pockets, light long-sleeve shirt (Enough clothes for one week. Remember, we have a washer)
- Two pairs of sturdy shoes for walking the beach at night (water resistant) and hiking in the area, rubber boots or tennis shoes.
- Sandals (good ones!), rubber boots and/or water shoes.
- Swimsuit(s)
- Insect repellent (not to be used on the beach with turtles)
- Beach/Bath towels.
- Waterproof sunscreen.
- Biodegradable shampoo, soaps, personal toiletries (be kind to Costa Rica's water system)
- Sunglasses.
- Camera (waterproof is always good)
- Entertainment: books, games, music, guitar, paints, soccer balls, etc.
- Students and researchers who come to do their own investigations should bring their own laptop or device to store information of their researches.

You will be provided with linens (sheets), three meals a day and snacks. We have Wi-Fi internet access, so you may wish to bring your laptop.

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 couple of supermarkets, shops and bars in walking distance from the Reserve.

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).

For more information about things to see and to do, please visit:

<http://www.uvita.info>



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