

Sea Turtle Conservation



Volunteer
Information
Guide



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Introduction

Osa Conservation is an international non-profit organization made up of dedicated Costa Rican and international biologists, educators, and conservation professionals who work to protect the globally significant biodiversity of Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula through land stewardship, scientific research, and educational outreach. Our conservation efforts are based at Piro Biological Station and the Greg Gund Conservation Center on the southern tip of the Osa Peninsula. We also have staff offices in Puerto Jiménez, Costa Rica and Washington, DC. Founded in 2003, we are the only non-profit organization with a permanent, on-the-ground presence in the Osa. Together we manage over 6,000 acres of property and have a dedicated team of over 25 full-time staff members.

The goal of our Sea Turtle Program is to guarantee the health and ecological success of the sea turtles who nest on the beaches of the Osa Peninsula. There are seven species of sea turtles in the world and all of them are considered threatened or endangered due to poaching, predation, habitat degradation and in-water threats. The world's sea turtles are incredibly susceptible to human and environmental threats and are in urgent need of global protection. Four of the seven sea turtle species visit the Osa Peninsula: Olive Ridleys (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), Black

or Pacific Green turtles, (*Chelonia mydas*), Leatherbacks, (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and Hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

Our Sea Turtle Conservation Program monitors the nesting activity, predation rates and hatchling success of the sea turtles that visit Osa's southern Pacific beaches: Piro and Pejeperro. Our work focuses mostly on Olive Ridley and Pacific Green sea turtles, the most abundant visitors to these beaches, and Leatherback and Hawksbill turtles when they make an occasional appearance. Together with our partner organizations, we monitor and protect 18 km of beach on the Osa - one of the most important nesting areas along the entire Pacific Coast of Costa Rica.

Our staff and volunteers gather important population and reproductive data and deter poachers who collect turtle eggs for consumption or sale. Protecting these turtles is a large undertaking - we can't do it on our own! Our efforts are made possible with the help of dedicated volunteers like you who have donated time and effort to protect these incredible creatures and their home.



Volunteer

Our volunteers come from all over the world to help guarantee the long-term health of Osa's sea turtle populations. Sea turtles choose to nest on the beaches of the Osa Peninsula for several reasons. The presence of many freshwater rivers and streams that run into the ocean, the soft dark sand, the vast, undeveloped coastline, and the stable sand throughout the year together provide an ideal for laying eggs. Our Sea Turtle Program collects vital baseline data that is shared with national and international networks of conservationists to enable regional and global efforts for sea turtle conservation. Volunteers contribute to our Sea Turtle Program by participating in beach patrols, monitoring efforts, and data collection. With the help of volunteers, we have released thousands of sea turtle hatchlings over the last few nesting seasons and carried out a number of educational projects to raise local awareness about the importance of conservation on the Osa Peninsula. Volunteers patrol the beaches nightly for nesting sea turtles, find and relocate vulnerable nests, maintain a protective hatchery, and record important data on turtle populations and nest conditions.

Volunteers also help us maintain our equipment and field station, and some participate in educational outreach projects in the local community. All volunteers work hard, but there is always time for rainforest hikes, swims in secluded waterfalls, and watching pristine sunsets on the beach. If you are interested in a unique and exciting learning experience in a region of unmatched beauty



and biodiversity, we invite you to participate! Volunteer positions are available year-round, during nesting season (June-November) as well as non-nesting season (November-May).

We rely on volunteers to make this project successful and it is our goal to provide an enriching and educational experience for everyone who contributes their time to this project. Our program allows volunteers to participate in supervised research alongside our staff and a team of dedicated research field assistants. It provides the opportunity to get close to these truly magnificent creatures and other wildlife in their natural habitats and make a true difference to the longevity of these species.



Roles and Commitments

We host volunteers of many ages and from many places, and all have a shared interest in helping to ensure the future of endangered sea turtles. Ideal candidates work well both independently and as a member of a team, enjoy being outdoors, are culturally sensitive and respectful, don't mind remote areas and, most importantly, are ready to have fun while helping an important cause!

We ask that you:

- Are in good health: turtle patrols are physically strenuous and require walking for 2.5 - 8 hrs in a humid tropical climate on soft sand, sometimes in heavy rain and hot sun.
- Commit to a minimum of one week
- Commit to working a minimum of 30 hours/week
- Are 18 years of age or older or accompanied by a guardian or group leader

Academic Credit

Many colleges and universities offer academic credit for independent work done in the field. Check with your local faculty before you leave about applying for credit and designing a suitable project evaluation.



As a volunteer you will:

- Conduct nightly and morning beach patrols with the help of staff and field assistants. During these surveys you will:
 - Take biometric measurements of nesting mother turtles and perform health assessments
 - Assist in the application of identification tags
 - Record data on sea turtle tracks and nest locations. Every turtle or nest sighting is recorded and stored in our data collection
- Perform nest excavations when needed and relocate vulnerable nests to our hatchery
- Monitor nesting sites for hatchlings and predators
- Carry out nest protection techniques and assessment of potential risk factors
- Mark and triangulate nest positions for later excavations
- Learn how to relocate and care for nests in our sea turtle hatchery, including performing temperature readings of nests and atmosphere
- Evaluate hatching success rates
- Prepare field equipment and materials for nightly patrols
- Transfer data gathered on patrols
- Maintain a weed and debris-free hatchery
- Perform periodic hatchery checks and excavation of hatched nests
- Release newly hatched turtles
- Maintain a clean and organized living area at the field station



Our Commitment

We are committed to ensuring that all participants have a safe and educational volunteer experience. Volunteers can expect:

- Pre-departure information about what to expect and what to bring
- Orientation upon arrival and introductory lecture on the ecology and conservation status of the different sea turtle species around the world and in the Osa Peninsula
- A detailed itinerary for the duration of your stay
- Basic training on the sea turtle field research techniques necessary for this project
- Training in scientific data collection and sea turtle fieldwork
- Supervision by a field coordinator or research assistant during daily activities, including night and morning beach patrols
- Access to on-site staff and field coordinators
- Full and immediate assistance from our staff in emergency situations
- Opportunities to:
 - Explore our network of trails covering 4,200 acres of property
 - Learn about tropical forest ecology and restoration
 - Take a kayak or horseback riding tour
 - Relax in one of the most beautiful rainforests in the world!

Our staff members are trained professionals with vast field experience. Volunteers can expect to interact with many of our staff members on a daily basis, and volunteers have the right to inform a staff member if they feel uncomfortable, unsafe or at risk. Remember, if you don't ask, we can't help! Our goal is to ensure that every volunteer feels welcome, safe, and that they are truly making a difference.





Accommodations

Volunteers with our sea turtle program stay at our main research facility, Piro Biological Station. From Piro, volunteers monitor and patrol two beaches, Piro and Pejeverro. Volunteers are offered comfortable shared accommodation in one of our three cabins. Each cabin has three bedrooms accommodating three people, two shared bathrooms, and a breezeway that can be set up for work or relaxation. In addition to the cabins, the research center is equipped with a laboratory, reference library and dining pavilion. Three delicious meals are served per day, usually variations on local Costa Rican fare. Dietary restrictions can be accommodated, if advanced notice is given. The station has 24-hour wireless internet access which is available only at the dining pavilion and in the laboratory.

Volunteers will interact with researchers and other visiting groups and have the opportunity to learn about various conservation activities and programs happening at our facilities. You will also have access to our extensive trail network that extends through 4,200 acres of property, covering diverse ecosystems including primary and secondary rainforest, beach, streams and wetlands.



Sample Schedule

DAY 1

Arrive at Puerto Jimenez. Check in at Osa Conservation Office.

18:00 Dinner

19:00 Intro Turtle Presentation

DAY 2

4:00 AM Patrol: Piro Beach

7:00 Breakfast

12:00 Lunch

18:00 Dinner

20:00 PM Patrol: Piro Beach

DAY 3

7:00 Breakfast

8:00 Volunteer Activity

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Native Species Reforestation Project

18:00 Dinner

20:00 PM Patrol: Pejeperro Beach.

DAY 4

7:00 Breakfast

8:00 Volunteer Activity

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Horseback riding tour

18:00 Dinner

20:00 PM Patrol Beach

DAY 5

FREE DAY

7:00 Breakfast

12:00 Lunch

18:00 Dinner

Plan a day for surfing, hiking, a trip to Puerto Jimenez, or just lounging around.

DAY 7

4:00 AM Patrol: Piro Beach

7:00 Breakfast

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Trail Walk

18:00 Dinner

20:00 PM Patrol: Piro Beach

DAY 6

4:00 AM Patrol: Pejeperro Beach

7:00 Breakfast

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Kayak Tour

18:00 Dinner

DAY 8

7:00 Breakfast

9:00 Bus to Puerto Jimenez



**Please note that beach monitoring times depend on high tide, the above itinerary is a rough estimate of when activities will be performed.*

Program Costs & Dates

Volunteer positions are available from the start of July through the first week of December of each year, coinciding with the peak of Olive Ridley nesting season. Volunteer programs begin on the Tuesday of each week.

| | Program Fee* | Accommodation Fee (Lodging & Food) | Total Cost |
|--------------------------|--------------|--|---|
| International Volunteers | \$300 | \$413/week | 1 week: \$713 2 weeks: \$1,126 3 weeks: \$1,539 4 weeks: \$1,652 |
| Costa Rican Volunteers | _____ | \$196/week | 1 week: \$196 2 weeks: \$392 3 weeks: \$588 4 weeks: \$784 |
| Program Interns | _____ | \$30/day (minimum 1 month commitment) | _____ |

*Program Fee includes: Materials and equipment as well as a horseback riding tour or kayaking tour.

** Please note that these costs do not include airfare and local travel to and from the site, personal expenses such as phone calls and laundry, and additional tours or activities outside of those scheduled.



What's Next?

1. Familiarize yourself with all the information you need

Before you apply, please make sure you've reviewed all information provided in this booklet and familiarized yourself with the volunteer duties. Next, download a copy of the Osa Visitors Guide here, which will provide you with all the information you need regarding the following:

- International travel to Costa Rica and in-country travel to the Osa Peninsula
- Health and safety issues
- Practicalities of travelling to the Osa
- Life at our facilities
- Station rules and code of conduct
- What to bring / what not to bring
- Excursions and adventure activities

and much more!

You may also want to familiarize yourself with some background information on sea turtle biology. Links to useful information are provided on the following page.

2. Sign up!

To apply, please visit <http://osaconservation.org/get-involved/volunteer/apply/>

After we have reviewed your application, you will receive an email confirming your dates and providing payment instructions. You can make one payment (program fee + accommodation fee) in full to Osa Conservation.

3. Contact us

If you have any questions that have not been answered in this information booklet or the visitors guide, please contact us at seaturtles@osaconservation.org.



Recommended Pre-Departure Reading

Costa Rica Information

<http://www.centralamerica.com/cr/info/>
<http://www.infocostarica.com/general/>

Sea Turtles Information

<http://www.ioseaturtles.org/Education/seaturtlebooklet.pdf>
<http://seaturtlestatus.org/>
<http://seaturtle.org/>

Tortugas Marinas (información)

<http://aula2.elmundo.es/aula/laminas/lamina1065712485.pd>



Frequently Asked Questions

How do I get there and are transportation costs included?

You have the option of traveling to Puerto Jiménez by plane (~50 minutes from San Jose) or bus (~9 hours). Reaching Piro from Puerto Jiménez takes about 90 minutes in public transport, along a bumpy rural road. We will send you detailed information about transport once you register for the program. You are responsible for your transportation, including international and domestic flights, local travel to/from Puerto Jimenez and the Piro Biological Station and any optional excursions.

Is there Internet? Is there electricity?

Our station is powered by 100% solar and hydroelectric power 24 hours a day. A wireless internet connection is available 24 hours a day at the main dining pavilion and laboratory. Laptops and other electronics can be used and charged, but we do remind our visitors that these are susceptible to damage caused by high humidity and curious insects, and that Osa Conservation takes no responsibility for their loss or damage. If you bring such items, we recommend using waterproof cases to protect them.

Is there safe storage?

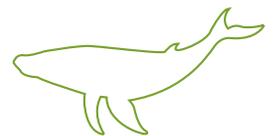
We discourage visitors from bringing valuables or items of high personal value with them. Although we consider the facilities to be very safe, we are not responsible for any personal items and have no facility for storing them.

How many hours per day and days per week will I be working?

You will be expected to work about 8 hours per day, or roughly 40 hours per week, between beach patrols and hatchery maintenance. Other activities will be scheduled outside of these shifts. Volunteers are entitled to one day off per week.

Do I need to speak Spanish?

A basic knowledge of Spanish is recommended but not required for a volunteer placement. Nearly all of our full-time staff members are fluent in Spanish and English and can assist you if the need arises.



What skills will I need?

You must have the ability to work in hot, humid conditions with lots of rain or lots of sun, be in good health, be able to walk long distances, and possess a desire to help in conservation.

Will I be required to operate any special equipment?

No.

Is there somewhere I can do my laundry?

Yes! You can hand wash clothes in the laundry sink or bring your laundry to a laundromat in Puerto Jiménez.

Who may have a difficult time at this placement?

Those who would find it a challenge to work outdoors in a tropical climate and/or are not able to do hours of physical work.

How do I apply?

To apply, please visit <http://osaconservation.org/get-involved/volunteer/apply/>

After we have reviewed your application you will receive an email confirming your dates and providing payment instructions. You can make one payment (program fee + accommodation fee) to Osa Conservation.

“When one tugs at a single string in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

- John Muir



