



A guide to the: *Costa Rica Turtle Conservation Experience*





Costa Rica Turtle Conservation Experience

Focus: Turtles

Location: Costa Rica

Start Date: Every Day (Aug - Dec)

Arrival & Starting Point: San José

Situated on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, the Costa Rica Turtle Conservation Experience was founded back in 2009 by community members and local scientists as a way to work towards environmental conservation in the country. The project site stands as a beacon of these conservation efforts, contributing both biological research and meaningful, hands-on activity in an attempt to provide a safe habitat for turtles and other wildlife species. In all, the aim of this project is to work alongside local communities, organisations, and both international and national governing bodies to promote environmental awareness, breeding a culture of positive touristic activity in the region.



Arriving here will strike volunteers with the essence of just why conservation is so important: verdant rainforests and rugged coastlines surround this area of Costa Rica, a reminder of how vital it is to preserve such a beautiful location, as well as its endemic animals. By working alongside the project team and your fellow volunteers, you will learn about and aid the conservation efforts of the Olive Ridley turtle. This is made possible by your ability to care for the babies at the hatchery, collecting crucial scientific data, and relocating eggs to the hatchery or beach whenever necessary.

With the help of volunteers, the hard-working project staff may succeed in protecting coastal animal populations, whilst teaching communities to care for their surroundings in a way which not only benefits the species in the area, but will aid the community themselves in living sustainably and in harmony with the nature that surrounds them.

With your help, the team on this fantastic turtle project will be able to continue in their mission to secure a future for Costa Rica's most vulnerable species, as well as providing you with a sense of fulfilment and memories to last a lifetime. What better way is there to visit one of the most species-rich destinations on the planet, than by volunteering to protect the animals that call Costa Rica home?

Data Collection



This activity will include monitoring the turtles nesting in the area and gathering crucial information on them. Once a turtle starts to lay eggs, you will help to collect and count the eggs from the nest when necessary, moving them to the hatchery to keep them safe. This activity will be covered further in the next section.

You will also help with the tagging and management of the adult turtles. This involves the observation of adult turtles emerging from the sea, with a member of the team placing a metal tag in each of the turtle's front flippers and volunteers using a flexible measuring tape to get the total length and width of the carapace. You will also mark the GPS point of the turtle's nest on the beach.

Working With Hatchlings

You may have the opportunity to help relocate some of the eggs back to the hatchery, a 5x5 metre area of clean sand taken from the beach and protected by a cage to keep the eggs safe from predators. As well as being at risk from predators, the eggs are susceptible to being damaged or lost due to erosion on the beach, and these threats must be managed if the project hopes to conserve the species. Once an adult turtle comes up from the shore to lay eggs, you will help to collect and count the eggs from the nest before moving them to the hatchery.

Eventually the eggs will hatch, at which point you will help to excavate them, checking for how many shells and living turtles remain, and taking biometric data from the hatchlings. If the timing is just right, you could be on hand for a baby turtle release, helping to scare away predators as the hatchlings make their way to the ocean!



Beach Night Patrols

Another important part of the turtle conservation effort is to monitor the beaches at night, keeping an eye out for poachers and other threats which the turtles may face on their journey to and from the ocean. This activity takes place nightly between the hours of 6pm and 5am, with volunteers covering a minimum of 3 hours each alongside a member of the project team. Once a turtle is observed arriving on the beach, you will take notes in your field book, writing down the hour that you saw the turtle, the species of turtle, the weather condition at the time, the tide and, if the turtle nests, the location where this happened.



Crocodile & Reptile Monitoring

This project isn't only about turtles: you'll also help to monitor some of the crocodile, small mammal and bird species from the region, adding any information that you gather to an inventory. The crocodilian aspect of this activity will be carried out along the T rraba river by night, with volunteers and the project team counting individuals and doing captures too. The captured crocs will be tagged in a similar way to the turtles to allow the team to estimate the size of the total population and, depending on the size of the individual, you will help to gather its morphological data (such as length, sex and weight). This activity takes place once per week between the hours of 5pm and 1am and is limited in its availability, with priority going to volunteers who have sound skills and knowledge relating to the task.

You may also take part in the monitoring of other reptiles, such as tree boas. Your group will head out into the field in search of the animals, allowing the project team to capture them. From here, the reptiles are taken back to the reserve for data collection, and any snakes will be tagged with a PIT (an electronic tag measuring around 12mm). This will enable the team not only to understand more about the species' populations, but to monitor their movements within the forest too.



Beach Clean-Up

It is very important that the nesting sites remain as healthy and safe as possible to give the turtles the best chance of survival. With this in mind, the project team will arrange beach clean-up activities around once per month, allowing volunteers to do their bit to keep the beaches safe for the animals. Something as simple as a plastic bottle could be extremely dangerous for a hatchling, so you need to be thorough here.

Working With Children

You will help to educate the local children about the wildlife in the area, and one of the ways to teach them about nature is in the 'Butterfly Garden'! You will prepare workshops, make crafts, and participate in outreach activities such as beach and river clean-ups, and will also take some time to help the children to maintain the butterfly garden itself. You will also have the opportunity to visit the children in school to teach them about sea turtles, marine resources, mammal diversity and recycling. Please note that this activity does not take place in December.



Itinerary

Day 1

After arriving into San José, you'll be transferred to the project site. Once you have settled into your accommodation, you will receive an induction all about the project, a summary of the project activities, and how you'll be helping the turtles during your time here!

Day 2

Today you will receive training on the nesting sea turtles, their biology, the differences between species and what to look out for in their behaviour. Later in the day, you will visit Tortuga Beach to learn about the research protocol and the turtle hatchery (located a 5-minute walk from the volunteer house).

Day 3

You may spot some birds or mammals today, as you will spend time exploring the reserve! When night falls, you'll switch to turtle duties, spending 3-4 hours searching for nesting sea turtles and collecting the eggs to bring back to the hatchery. This will be your first chance to study the turtles up close as you gather data from the turtles themselves, as well as from their nests.

Day 4

After spending some of the previous night working with the turtles, you'll be pleased to hear that you've got the morning off to catch up on some rest! In the afternoon, you'll be working with the educational collaboration officer, taking care of the butterfly garden or visiting local schools.

Day 5

Today, you'll head into the forest to help set up trail cameras in an attempt to spot the mammals which live in the area. Since 2013 (when the mammal monitoring began), there have been many medium-sized animals spotted - you'll be learning how to do this, too! You may also have the opportunity to tag certain species (such as snakes) to allow them to be tracked later.

Day 6

Today is your day off, and you'll have the opportunity to explore the area if you wish. Relax on a nearby beach, head to one of the local waterfalls, or book an excursion - just speak to the project team to learn more.

Day 7

Depending on the weather conditions, you may spend today monitoring the local crocodilian populations by taking a kayak out on the reserve waterways, taking note of the species you see. Later, you may go on a night walk, or even take the boat down the local river to see more wildlife!

Day 8

Unfortunately, it's now time for you to head home. Bid farewell to your fellow volunteers and the project team before taking a taxi back to San José airport or embarking on your independent travel plans. Please note that the journey back to the airport takes around 3.5 hours, so make sure that your return flight leaves at an appropriate time!

Please note that this itinerary is just an example, and that your own time spent volunteering is subject to change. A schedule will be laid out and presented to you when you arrive.

If you arrive into San José after 3pm, you will need to spend the night in a hotel before transferring to the project the next day.

Accommodation

During this project, you will stay in the volunteer centre. There is enough room here for up to 15 volunteers to stay at one time. If you are joining the project as a family, as a couple or with a friend, you may be allocated a room on the ground floor; one room has a double bed, whilst the other has a double bed and a single bed. Please note that these rooms are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Otherwise, you will stay in a private room on the upper floor of the volunteer house; these rooms are basic but comfortable and come with a single bed, storage for your belongings and screened windows to prevent bugs from getting in. Mosquito nets are provided for your nights spent at the turtle camp.

Elsewhere, you will have access to shared bathroom facilities, complete with hot water showers and western toilets. These bathrooms are on the ground floor and are split by gender. Finally, you will have weekly use of the on-site washing machine and drying area and, depending on the season, you may also have access to a solar powered drying tent.



Food & Drink

All meals and beverages are included in the price of this project, though alcohol is strictly not permitted onsite. A member of staff will prepare lunch for you from Monday to Friday, while you will prepare your own breakfast and dinner throughout the week and all meals at the weekend. If you wish to visit a local restaurant, there are some great options in the local town!

The food on this project may consist of gallo pinto (rice and beans), tortillas and various meats, fruits and vegetables. The kitchen has a pantry and fridges full of easy-to-cook options, though if you have any dietary requirements we do ask that you let us know in advance so that suitable items can be bought in for you.



What's Included

- Accommodation
- All meals
- Airport transfers
- English-speaking project leader
- Laundry facilities (available once per week)
- Wi-Fi
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- All flights
- Any vaccinations
- Visas
- Travel insurance

Volunteer Reviews

Kate

"This was a super experience. We learned so much from our week at the reserve - always hands-on, always ready to be involved!"



Jordan

"I went expecting to send a few turtles back to the ocean and that's it. During my week, we released countless sea turtles, found a dozen nests, and watched turtles lay their eggs, too! Fantastic."



Andrea

"I'll never forget finding a fresh nest with about 98 sea turtle eggs on a midnight beach patrol shift, and the team digging them out one by one. Such a precious, special moment."





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Costa Rica Turtle Conservation Experience is simple, and you can help make a difference to turtle conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Costa Rica!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

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