Welcome to the SEE Turtles Costa Rica Student Green Turtle Research Expedition! On this unique volunteer vacation, your group will spend four nights with researchers helping to catch and study green sea turtles in the Golfo Dulce, a calm gulf located between the Osa Peninsula and southern Pacific coast. By joining this trip, your group will be directly supporting community-based conservation of these turtles by providing alternative income to poaching and generating funds to expand their efforts. For this trip, we partner with the great folks at EcoTeach, a leading student travel organization based in Seattle, WA.

We started SEE Turtles in 2008 to encourage travelers to visit turtle conservation projects where their visit will make a difference in efforts to protect these endangered creatures. In October 2014, we joined forces with The Oceanic Society to bring these trips to more people around the world and increase our support for conservation programs. Please join us on this action-packed volunteer trip. We will meet and interact with the dedicated people working to protect their natural resources and learn much about the biology and threats facing Costa Rica’s wildlife, all while enjoying one of the most beautiful parts of the country.

We hope to SEE you in Costa Rica!

For the turtles-

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**Trip Information**

**Costa Rica Student Green Turtle Research**

Students will help researchers study green and hawksbill turtles in the Golfo Dulce. Spend 5 days on the incredible Osa Peninsula catching and releasing turtles, restoring mangroves, and more.

*This itinerary is flexible and can be changed based on your group’s budget and goals. Contact us for a customized quote at right.*

**Dates:** Available year round (October & November are very rainy)

**Notes:**

- Recommended for students Grade 5 and up.
- Group size is limited to 20 people maximum.
- The heavy part of the rainy season is October - November.
- For an extra cost, we can also include participation in a nearby whale and dolphin conservation project.
DAY 1: ARRIVE TO SAN JOSE

Your group will be picked up at the San Jose Airport and taken to Francisco’s, a family-owned lodge about 20 minutes away. Get a good night’s sleep to rest up for the fast-paced trip.

DAY 2: DRIVE TO THE OSA PENINSULA

After breakfast, you’ll head to the South Pacific coast in a private vehicle (about a 5-hour drive). Along the way, you will stop for lunch and take in the beautiful views. After settling in to your cabins, researchers from our partner Latin American Sea Turtles will give an orientation to the turtle research and train you in data collection techniques.

This evening, relax and get a good night’s sleep. Overnight at Delfines de Golfo, a simple family lodge with electricity, and private bath with hot water.

DAY 3: SEA TURTLE RESEARCH

Today is all about sea turtles. Head out in a shaded boat with researchers to help set nets in key turtle spots (timing dependant on the tide). You will have the opportunity to help bring in the turtles, measure them, and perhaps even tag them. You’ll be looking mainly for green turtles and hawksbills, which are both endangered. Feel free to take a late afternoon swim to cool off.

DAY 4: MANGROVE RESTORATION

This morning, you will participate in a mangrove reforestation program by working in the nursery and planting young trees. You will also work in their small turtle rescue center if any turtles are present.

The afternoon will be free to relax or to do an optional activity such as going for a guided rainforest walk to learn about the incredible diversity of plants and animals in this beautiful part of the country. This area has scarlet macaws, 3 species of monkeys, and many other animals to look for.

DAY 5: TURTLE RESEARCH & CHOCOLATE TOUR

Today, the group will split the day between another round of turtle research and a sweet activity. Head into the rainforest to learn about the origins of chocolate. See a farm where cacao is grown and work through the process from seed to deliciousness.

DAY 6: RETURN TO THE CENTRAL VALLEY

This morning, you’ll have one last chance to participate in turtle research or mangrove restoration before returning to San Jose. After lunch, you will board your private bus for the drive back to stay near San Jose.

DAY 7: DEPART FOR HOME

Head out for the airport in time for your flight, taking along your memories, photos, souvenirs, and stories to tell friends!
Recommended Packing List

Pack in a duffel bag/suitcase/backpack that you can carry yourself and a day pack (If you have a suitcase with wheels, please realize there may be times when you will need to carry it short distances - wheels don’t work well in sand, gravel or mud). * Indicates required items.

**Clothing**

- Sturdy sneakers or lightweight hiking boots
- Close-toed sandals for beach walks*
- 3-4 Pairs socks
- 2 Pairs of dark colored lightweight pants (nylon is better than cotton)*
- 2 Pairs of long sleeve dark colored lightweight shirts
- 3-4 Pairs shorts
- 5-6 T-shirts or short sleeve shirts
- Lightweight, nylon windbreaker jacket
- Rain gear or poncho (dark color for turtle patrols)*
- Sun hat for the beach
- Underwear—lots
- Pajamas or sleepwear

**Toiletries**

- Comb/brush
- Shampoo/bath soap (ideally biodegradable)
- Sunscreen 30+ (waterproof)
- Insect repellent & after-bite stick
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste/toothbrush
- Washcloth
- Beach towel
- Hand Sanitizer (small bottle)
- Prescription medications in CARRY ON baggage
- Personal items

**Other Stuff**

- Refillable bottle for water (clean water will be provided to fill your bottle)*
- Passport and a photocopy of passport
- Money (recommend $200-$250 clean bills for tips and souvenirs)
- Camera
- Binoculars (your guide will also have a pair)
- Games, cards, things to do at night and on the bus
- Small flashlight or headlamp with extra batteries
- Large ziplock bags for wet clothes & shoes
- Ziplock bags for electronics
- Sunglasses
Frequently Asked Questions

Turtle Issues

Am I guaranteed to see a sea turtle?
As with most wild animals, there is never a guarantee to see a sea turtle (they are endangered of course). However, the research team does catch turtles most of the times they set the nets. Green turtles are more likely to be found than hawksbills. In this part of the country, the turtles forage in the Gulf and there aren’t distinguishable seasons when it is more or less likely to see a sea turtle.

Should I worry about poachers?
Nope. This trip does not involve walking a nesting beach so no poachers around here. We do send people to turtle nesting beaches in Costa Rica on other trips, but we are confident of the safety of every place we sent people.

How does this trip benefit turtle conservation?
SEE Turtles runs sea turtle trips as a way to help save these incredible animals. To participate in the work and stay at the research station, we pay a fee to the local partner which helps to cover the costs of the conservation and research efforts. Finally, every tour saves at least 100 hatchlings through a donation to the local conservation organization through our Billion Baby Turtles initiative.

Will I get to do every volunteer job on the trip?
As we can’t guarantee that you will see a sea turtle, we also can’t guarantee you’ll get to do every job in the volunteer program. We hope to give every participant the opportunity to do each job but it depends on the number of participants, the number of turtles encountered, and the individual circumstances with each turtle (sometimes more complicated situations require the researchers to do specific jobs).

Generally the tagging and tissue sampling are done only by research staff. If there is one specific job you really want to do, let your guide know and he will do his best to accommodate your request. Check out the page “Daily Life on a Volunteer Project” for details about the tasks involved in sea turtle research (note that page is primarily focused on nesting beach projects but much of the work is the same at this project).
Logistical/Travel Issues

How much money should I bring?
We recommend that each participant bring $250 in cash for tipping and spending money. U.S. bills of $20 and less are widely accepted in Costa Rica (with change given in dollars or Costa Rican colones). Many shop owners are wary of accepting torn or “old-looking” bills—so please bring crisp newer bills if possible! Small bills ($1’s and $5’s) are useful at the turtle projects where there are no banks and people have a harder time finding change for larger bills.

How much should I tip?
Tipping guides isn’t mandatory, but it is customary (like tipping servers here in the states). We recommend tipping $8 to $10 dollars per day per participant to divide between your guide(s) and driver. (That would be $70 to $100 per participant depending on the length of the trip). Participants will not need to tip anyone else along the way.

Can I call home or check my email while in Costa Rica?
Calling home from Costa Rica can be expensive. For email, you should not rely on or expect to be able to get online while on the trip. The cabins at this project have WiFi in the main kitchen but it can be very spotty and often does not work. Cell phones from the US or Canada often do not work in Costa Rica or automatically switch you to a local service which activates international roaming fees. If you plan to bring a cell phone, please check with your provider about coverage and cost.

Are the electrical outlets the same as in the US?
The voltage in Costa Rica is the same as the states. However, most outlets are 2 prong instead of 3 prong, so if you are bringing something that needs 3 prongs you need to bring an adapter. And remember, depending on which turtle project you go to, there may only be solar power, and no outlets will be available during those days.

Can I go to an ATM in Costa Rica?
Although there are ATMs in Costa Rica, much of the time you will be in places where they are not available. And in places where they do have ATMs, they don’t always work. The bottom line—while you may be able to get cash from ATMs, don’t count on it.

How should I handle medications I need to bring?
If you plan to bring personal medicine to Costa Rica, please consider the following:
• Carry just the necessary quantity, which is the quantity normally used by a person having your health problem.
• Bring a prescription or a written statement from your doctor, specifying that the medicine is being used under his/her control and that you need it for your physical health.
• Have the medicines labeled or properly identified.

Do I need any vaccinations before going?
Since we are not doctors, we cannot give you advice on vaccinations. We recommend speaking with your doctor or visiting a travel clinic. You can also check the CDC website for Costa Rica for the most up-to-date information.

What is the weather like on Costa Rica’s Pacific coast?
There are two seasons in this part of Costa Rica. The dry season (aka summer) lasts from December to May. The rainy season (aka winter) is from July to November though its only October and November where the weather gets bad, otherwise it rains but usually not all day.
In-Water Monitoring

Foraging sea turtles are mainly found in shallow (<50m), hard-bottom substrates or sea grass beds in coastal areas, in some cases around coral reefs. By sampling the Golfo Dulce, it is possible to gain information on the demographic structure of the population, such as abundance of immature, adults, male and non-breeding females, and their behavior.

Once a sea turtle is caught we untangle them from the net, take them into the boat. We check every individual for wounds or anomalies. Then we take data of the biometry of the turtle (size of the carapace) and tag them with metal and PIT tags in case the sea turtle doesn’t have any tag, and take tissue samples to examine the mitochondrial DNA to reconstruct the lineage of the females. All the data (size, tag-number, sample numbers) needs to be recorded in a clean and correct manner.

Mangrove Reforestation Program

Mangroves play a very important role in the coastal ecosystems of de Golfo Dulce. Not only are they benefitting fishes, birds, invertebrates and humans, but also sea turtles. This is why LAST started a reforestation program in Playa Blanca, to recover mangrove areas that have been destroyed in the past. Volunteers are asked to assist with:

- Looking for seeds
- Getting mud for the plants and seedlings
- Sow seeds into plastic bags in our nursery
- Bringing the propagules to the designated planting place when they reach a certain size and plant them
- Maintenance work of the nursery

All activities, except the work in the nursery, depend on the low tide time. Consider that you will be working mostly in the mud or with mud, which is the reason we recommend not to wear new cloth or shoes including also your favorites. Work with mangrove reforestation is rather a new activity with barely any local scientific information.
Green Sea Turtles
The green turtle is the second largest after the leatherback. They can weigh up to 500 lbs (225 kg) and reach four feet (1.2 m) in length. The adult is an herbivore, dining on sea grasses, seaweeds, algae and other forms of marine plant life. Their beak is sharp and finely serrated, perfectly adapted for grazing in seagrass beds and scraping algae off of hard surfaces. This species can be found in the sub-tropics and tropics worldwide, with major nesting beaches in Tortuguero (Costa Rica), Oman, Florida, and Raine Island (Australia) where thousands of turtles nest each night during peak nesting season.

The green turtles you find in the Pacific are also known as black turtles due to their darker shells. Most scientists believe that black turtles are a sub-species of green turtles but some believe they are a different species.

Learn more about green turtles on our website.

Hawksbill Sea Turtles
Considered by many to be the most beautiful of sea turtles for their colorful shells, the hawksbill is found in tropical waters around the world. They spend their time in coral reefs, rocky areas, lagoons, mangroves, oceanic islands, and shallow coastal areas.

Named for its narrow head and sharp, bird-like beak, hawksbills can reach into cracks and crevices of coral reefs looking for food. Their diet is very specialized, feeding almost exclusively on sponges. One of the smaller turtles, adults weigh between 100-200 pounds (45 - 90 kg) and reach 2-3 feet (roughly .5 to 1 meter) in length. Learn more about their diet.

This species inhabits tropical and some sub-tropical regions in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. The largest populations occur in the Caribbean Sea, the Seychelles, Indonesia, Mexico, and Australia. Hawksbills are not found in the Mediterranean and few are found in US waters; only a handful nest in Florida each year.

Learn more about hawksbill turtles on our website.
Latin American Sea Turtles (LAST)
The mission of LAST is to improve the conservation status of the marine turtles in Costa Rica. Their projects include nesting beach conservation projects in the Osa Peninsula and elsewhere. To date, we have donated more than $5,000 to protect leatherback turtles along Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast and sent dozens of volunteers to participate in their projects. Learn more about LAST on their website.

Osa In-Water Research Project
The project Osa In-Water is located on Playa Blanca, close to Puerto Jiménez on the Osa Peninsula in the southern Pacific province of Puntarenas, Costa Rica. The surrounding landscape of Playa Blanca is a lot of flat farmland, however most of the Osa Peninsula is under some kind of protection. The reason why is because this area is one of 25 biodiversity hotspots worldwide, with a vast variety of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects.

The Golfo Dulce, the body of water between the mainland and the Osa Peninsula, is one of just four tropical fjords worldwide and hosts a fascinating variety of marine life, including sea turtles, two species of dolphins, and at some points during the year humpback whales and whale sharks.
SEE Turtles
SEE Turtles was launched in 2008 as the world’s first effort to protect these species through ecotourism. Since then, we have expanded to include educational programs and our Billion Baby Turtles project. To date, we have generated more than $500,000 for turtle conservation and local communities, saved more than 250,000 turtle hatchlings at more than 10 projects around Latin America, and reached more than 5,000 students with our educational programs. SEE Turtles joined with Oceanic Society in October 2014.

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Oceanic Society
Since 1969, Oceanic Society has been inspiring and empowering people worldwide to take part in building a healthy future for the world’s oceans. We have guided tens of thousands of travelers on life-changing journeys to explore the natural world. Our mission is to conserve marine wildlife and habitats by deepening the connections between people and nature through research, community engagement, and first-hand experience. We pursue our mission through directed investments in conservation, applied marine research, and innovative travel programs.

www.OceanicSociety.org