

# Rescue and Conservation Sea Turtle Center at Pacuare Beach

Basic information



## 2012

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## **Rescue and Conservation Sea Turtle Center at Pacuare Beach**



The project is located in the north of the Caribbean province Limón, 1km northwards of the Pacuare River. The beach is part of the 50km coastline stretching between Tortuguero National Park and the port of Limón, one of the biggest ports of Costa Rica. It is an important nesting beach for Leatherback and Green Sea Turtles

and sometimes also visited by the rare Hawksbill Sea Turtle. Moreover the tropical rainforest, mangroves and rivers are home for a lot of exotic animals like alligators, sloths, monkeys and hundreds of birds.

### **About us**



WIDECAST is an international independent nonprofit organization that supports local sea turtle conservation in most states and countries of the Caribbean region promoting cooperation between all nations. For over two decades

WIDECAST's National Coordinators have worked together with scientists, conservationists, resource managers and educators to promote sustainable and effective sea turtle management programs, local as well as international, at the whole Caribbean Coast.

In 1986 WIDECAST started working on protecting the Leatherback Sea Turtle nesting population at Gandoca beach in Costa Rica. Since then we have been realizing even more projects alone and in cooperation with other organizations. WIDECAST and its partners have put a strategy into practice combining conservation and sustainable development through activities that directly benefit both, the people and the environment. The focus has been on establishing the conditions for a self-sustaining process, involving work in the broad areas of conservation, economic development, training and education, organization, and advocacy. Although the taking of eggs has no immediate effect on the number of turtles nesting, the population could collapse in 20-50 years when no new females are left to return to nest. At the moment, the projects are helping to slow down that tendency.

## About the Project

The project is located between the mouth of the Pacuare River in the south and the Tortugero National Park northwards. This is a very remote area.

In April 2004 Paul Lepoutre took the initiative to establish a biological reserve there. His approach was rather unique and has the special attention and support of various organizations around the world, most notably the World Wildlife Fund. In December 2011, it became the responsibility of Widecast to carry on the good work. The next step will be to build a rescue center for sea turtles at the project side in December. By this, we will not only be able to protect the nesting females and their babies but also help injured or by the police confiscated sea turtles to regain their strength for a life in the ocean.



The main threats for the sea turtles at the beach are human poachers and beach erosion. Through the close involvement with the very remote village of the area, the sea turtle conservation project provides not only a unique opportunity for volunteers to experience a true community-based Costa Rican conservation project but also offers a legal and sustainable revenue to the community. The data taken from nesting females improves our understanding of their behavior and helps coordinating the worldwide conservation efforts.

Although the main focus is on the Leatherback Sea Turtle, there are also Green Sea Turtles and some Hawksbill Sea Turtles coming to the beach to nest. Like all sea turtles species, they are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Leatherback and the Green Sea Turtle are ranked as “Endangered” and the Hawksbill Sea Turtle as “Critically Endangered”, which means if we don’t take serious measures, it is very likely that they will become extinct.



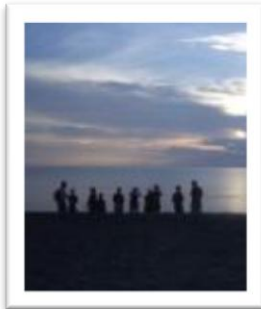
Therefore every helping hand is welcome in Pacuare. Each season the project recruits national and international volunteers as part of the conservation project.

The project also welcomes school classes and university groups to work as part of the environmental education program.

## How can you help? – Volunteer work

The main work of the volunteers at our project is assisting the staff of the project with the data collection and egg protection of the sea turtles. It involves night patrols and hatchery shifts as well as daytime work like beach cleanup, or small projects, including initial construction of the hatcheries.

### Night Patrols



The night patrols, a group of volunteers led by an experienced patrol leader, walk one of the sectors of the 11km long beach searching for nesting females. An average night patrol will take 4 hours but can last longer in case of sea turtle encounters.

Once a turtle is encountered on a night patrol, the volunteers work directly with it, taking carapace and nest dimension measurements, collecting eggs, tagging the flippers or collect DNA samples.

The collected eggs will be relocated on the beach or taken to the hatchery where the volunteers on shift will build a new nest (according to measurements that were taken) and transplant the eggs. The number of eggs, nest location and turtle identification information (*tag number*) are then recorded by the hatchery attendant for further data analysis for example hatchling survival rate.



The project avoids every form of confrontation with egg poachers. If a shift encounters poachers they won't do anything.

### Hatchery Shifts



The tasks in the hatchery will be relocating nest (as described above), keeping out predators and tourists, giving information to tourists, taking nest temperatures and measurements and releasing hatchlings. The approximate incubation time for all sea turtle eggs is 60 days, therefore midway through the season the duties of the hatchery attendants increase as the hatchlings begin to emerge. At this time, all nests in the hatcheries must be checked every 10 minutes during the day

and every 15 minutes during the night. If hatchlings are encountered they must be counted and released in the evening to an appropriate location along the high tide line and observed until they reach the sea. Hatchlings are never released directly into the sea.



## Accommodation and food

Volunteers are going to sleep in shared cabins belonging to the station of the project area. Three meals a day are included and served in the station, tea and coffee is available at all times.

The project is located in a quiet remote area, bordered by the sea on the one, a canal on the other side and only accessible by boat. Therefore the accommodation is very basic and simple. Electricity is available to light the community area at night but not for personal needs. Water comes from a well and there is no internet and cell phone signal only with good luck. You will be told how you can call for help in case of an emergency at once you arrived at the project site.



If someone wants to buy something he or she should do that in Bataan before entering the boat. Once at the project site, there is no shop available.



In your free time you can choose from a wide variety of activities, like Spanish classes, fishing, playing soccer or volleyball, kayaking, hiking or just relaxing on the beach or in a hammock.

*In case you're interested in the Spanish classes please notify in your online registration and on arrival at the project side.*

## Prices and payments

The price participating in the project is \$45 per night. The total fee should be paid before traveling to the beach at the WIDECAST office in San José, Tibás. We accept Dollars and Colones (preferably Dollars) but no payment by credit card or travelers checks. If you prefer to get the money from an atm here in Costa Rica rather than bringing cash, we will be of assistance.

Travel costs are not included in the fee. Volunteers should plan approximately US\$5 for the bus from San Jose to Bataan and US\$35 for the boat trip from Bataan to the project.



	Cabin (\$45)
Accommodation	✓
Food and drinks	✓
Educational training	✓
Practical training	✓
Travel costs	not included, about \$40
Free time activities	not included

For student groups of a minimum of 12 persons we might be able to offer discounts. In case you are older than 20 and have some environmental/biological background, you can apply for one of our 12 positions per year for Research Assistants. Just ask for further information or special

offers at [volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org)!

## You can expect

- three meals a day
- experience of a rural community based life
- opportunity to speak Spanish with the locals
- educational presentation about sea turtles and the work with them
- practical training for data collection (how to take measurements, tagging, DNA samples,...)
- practical training for hatchery (relocating nests, taking measurements of hatchlings, ...)
- access to staff and biologists for gaining insight in professional conservation work

## What we expect from you

- being in a good physical condition (on night patrol you will walk on average 5 - 11 km in the dark on soft, wet sand)
- not severe eyesight problems (most work is at night without artificial lights)
- no abuse of illegal drugs; no consumption of alcohol during working hours or abuse of alcohol
- preferably non-smoking. Those who do smoke should do so only in open areas and never on nightly patrols or hatchery shift. Cigarette stubs are to bin
- being of age (18 years) or older; Volunteers younger than 18 years need a supervisor or a written permission of the parents
- should be able to work hard and live in simple conditions
- working at least 30 hours/week including working during the night or on weekends. Sometimes volunteers are asked to work more than that
- 

## What to bring

To make your stay an unforgettable experience you have to be good prepared. Please read the following list carefully.

### Documents:

- valid passport and a photocopy of the first page (carry the photocopy separately)
- copy of the health insurance

*Please note: Because of the Costa Rican law it is an obligation that volunteers have a health insurance. Without this insurance participation is not possible.*

### Clothing

*Pack for hot weather and dirty conditions. Lightweight and fast-drying articles are best. Don't bring denim. It NEVER dries in tropical humidity.*

- 2-3 sets of dark-colored field clothes (black!), long sleeves for the patrols
- dark colored raincoat or poncho
- quick dry shorts / shirts for day work
- plenty of socks / underwear
- swimsuit
- sunglasses / hat
- towels



### Footwear

- close-toed beach shoes that can get wet, for example crocs (black!)
- hiking shoes or boots – comfortable and broken in
- tennis shoes / sneakers for around camp.
- flip flops / sandals

### Gear

- (head) torch with a red light!! (without red light you can't work in the hatchery)
- extra batteries, or a solar charger with rechargeable batteries (recommended)
- waterproof watch
- sun block
- insect repellent (!!)
- alarm clock
- water bottle
- day pack for hikes
- *optional*: mosquito net, basic first aid kit especially for mosquito bites, flag or banner from your home country
- small padlock for your locker
- black bag for your backpack should it rain on the boat.

### Personal

- toiletries (biodegradable products are best)
- personal medication
- camera, books, games, snorkeling stuff, instruments, music player, etc.
- money for local transportation, telephone calls, souvenirs, other activities

## How to participate

Volunteers are welcome to join the project every Monday or Thursday for at least 7 nights, 8 days. We can offer transportation from San Jose to Bataan on Mondays. To participate, just fill in the online inscription form

you get from the Volunteers Coordinator ([volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org)). Before leaving to the project, please make a personal visit in the main office in San José, Tibás. The visit enables you to confirm your reservation and to pay the participation money and allows us to give you final information and instructions on how to get there.

#### *Season:*

*Leatherback turtle:* March 1<sup>st</sup> – July 31<sup>st</sup>

*Green turtle:* July 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>

*Hawksbill (very few nests):* May 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>

## Other Services

### Airport pick up

If you need an airport pick up we can arrange that for you. Just get back to us after you have your plane ticket and send us the airline, flight number and arrival time. The pick-up is \$40 before 10 PM and \$45 after and the airport is about one hour away from Tibás. As well from the office to the Caribbean bus station next morning is \$20. This is a service provided by WIDECAS and can be slightly more expensive than taking normal taxis, but at the same time it is much easier and faster because in Costa Rica addresses and street names are not really existing.

### Stay in San José

We can offer to stay your first and/or last night(s) in our office in San José, Tibás at our volunteer's room called "New Leatherbackpacker's" for \$45/night. The room is part of the WIDECAS office which gives you the opportunity to meet and communicate with the people from WIDECAS before going to the project.

Naturally, you are free to stay where you want during your time here.

We can recommend Hotel Casa Beto (\$35/night, breakfast included), TranquiloBackpackers, CostaRicaBackpackers or PangeaHostel.

## Contact

Tibás Office address:

If arriving by Taxi, show this address to the Cab driver:

*"Tibás, 200 metros norte y 25 oeste de la Municipalidad de Tibás, casa a mano izquierda, con rotulos de tortugas"*

If you have any questions, please contact the Volunteers Program Coordinator at the address below:

Apdo. 2164-3000 Heredia, COSTA RICA

Tel.: (00506) 2241-7431

Cell phone: (00506)86566249 (Hauke)

Fax: (00506) 2241-7149

E-mail: [volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.org)

Skypename: volcowidecastcostarica



## Please read

*The idea of working to help save the endangered Sea Turtles is a very romantic one. The reality is a very different experience. When deciding if this is the type of work you would like to be involved in, please remember:*

- Most of the work is at night, working between the hours of 8PM and 4AM. On night patrol you will walk on average 11 km in the dark on soft, wet sand
- There may be times when volunteers will be asked to work both during the day and at night and more than 30 hours/week but also times when volunteers don't have a lot to do and have to spend their time by their own.
- Night patrols will still take place during the rain. There will be some nights when there are few or no turtles nesting. Patrols will still take place. We cannot be sure when or if turtles will nest.
- Pacuare is located at the Caribbean coast. This means it is hot with 100% humidity, it rains frequently and sometimes heavily. In the area there are Mosquitoes, sand flies and sand fleas.
- The place is situated in an isolated location, being in the middle of the rainforest. Accommodation and food are basic and adapted to the local habits.
- Working with the turtles is a brilliant unforgettable experience and we really need your help. However, this experience is not for everyone.

*"My experience with WIDECAST was quite challenging but even more rewarding. Once I saw a leatherback laying her eggs in front of me, the long walk, the sand fly bites and the late hours were all worth it! I honestly wished I had more time!", Latavia from Canada*