

# LAST – Latin American Sea Turtles

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COSTA RICA

## OSA IN-WATER VOLUNTEERING

General Information



2016

## WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF THE COSTA RICAN SEA TURTLES!



**LAST (Latin American Sea Turtles) is part of WIDECAST's (Wider Caribbean sea Turtle Conservation Network) Latin American Program in Costa Rica, encompassing efforts not only on the Caribbean Sea but also on the Pacific. WIDECAST is an expert network of biologists, managers, community leaders and educators in more than 40 nations and territories, committed to an integrated, regional capacity that ensures the recovery and sustainable management of depleted sea turtle populations.**

**At LAST we ask ourselves: What would a sustainably managed sea turtle population look like? What would it look like to a government? To a fisher, a coastal community, a child? To an hotelier, a dive operator, a tourist? What would it look like to a reef, a sea grass bed, a sandy beach? Each of these entities, and many others, rely upon and/or benefits from the sea turtle population in measurable ways.**

**Borrowing the parlance of sustainable development, a sustainably managed sea turtle population might be defined as one that meets the – ecological, economic, socio-cultural, political, aesthetic, and spiritual – needs of the present without compromising the ability of the population to fulfill these roles in the future. LAST seeks to bring the best available science to legislation and policy, education and outreach, for training and professionals, conservation and advocacy, and to research and population monitoring.**

**If policies aimed at sustainability are our goal, what do such policies look like? What roles can an individual (a community, a nation) play? This site is designed to empower you to make more informed choices, choices rooted in the belief that the decisions we make today will create the choices and opportunities of tomorrow; just as the decisions of generations past have painted the landscape that we see today.**



In-Water - 2016

LAST/WIDECAST Volunteering Osa



## JOIN THE CONSERVATION! EXPLORE, LEARN AND ACT!

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## About us:

**WIDECAST** is a non-profit organization that supports local sea turtle conservation initiatives in most states and countries in the Caribbean region. The WIDECAST Program originated from the sea turtle projects in Gandoca and Cahuita, initiated from Asociación ANAI back in 1986. They strive to promote and create cooperative conservation actions regarding sea turtles in all nations.

**Asociación LAST** has been working with volunteers under the WIDECAST Program since 2007. Now as an independent organization, LAST is working for the conservation and sustainable development of the coastal regions of Costa Rica, such as the north Caribbean and the south Pacific. These regions have immense biological richness, with 2.5% of the world's biological diversity.

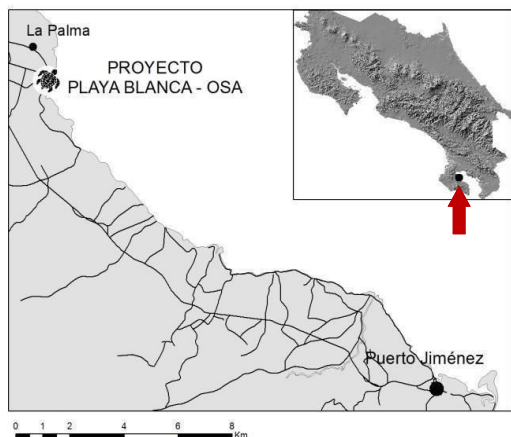
In 2010 LAST discovered sea turtle foraging areas in the Golfo Dulce. This discovery resulted in the creation of the volunteer program in 2011 in Playa Blanca. In 2012, the rescue center became available for any sea turtles in need of medical assistance or rehabilitation on the Osa Peninsula. In 2013, the voluntourism project became official (adding more local host families and promotion of locals tours/activities). The Osa In-Water project is open year round since foraging Hawksbill and Pacific Green sea turtles are present in the Golfo Dulce during all seasons.



As part of the conservation effort, LAST relies on both national and international volunteers to help in the research and conservation work of the projects.



## Osa In-water



The project Osa In-Water is located in 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. This is due to the fact that this area is one of 25 biodiversity hotspots worldwide, with a vast variety of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects. The Golfo Dulce, one of the four tropical fiords worldwide, hosts additionally a fascinating marine life – including sea turtles! In other words, at our Osa in-water project you will be surrounded by a natural paradise!

The Osa In-Water project was founded in 2010, after WIDECAST was successful with the same in-water monitoring method in 2007 in Cahuita, in the South Caribbean of Costa Rica. The dynamics of the local sea turtle populations is poorly understood, and while some information on females has been gathered from nesting beaches, little is known about population structure, genetic origin and in-water habitat use.

Sea turtles spend only 1% of their lives on the nesting beaches and due to this behavioral pattern, mainly only adult females are studied. Very little information is available about juvenile populations and sex ratios of adult populations. Therefore, more inwater work is needed to increase knowledge about habitats used by sea turtles in different life stages in order to assess the types of threats they are exposed to.



On the Osa Peninsula, LAST is working mainly with the Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and the Pacific Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), also known as the Black sea turtle. Both species are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The Pacific Green sea turtle is 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. For that reason, every helping hand is welcome!

## How can you help?

The project recruits national and international volunteers to support our field work as part of the research and conservation project. It is essential that the monitoring and tagging efforts continue in order to gain a better understanding of different size classes, their roles in coral reefs, different habitat uses, and health status. Volunteers support our scientists and research assistants in the field work. This will include different tasks in our four different working areas.

## In-Water Monitoring:

Foraging sea turtles are mainly found in shallow waters (<50m) with 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 turtles, male and non-breeding females, and their behavior.

### Parameters Studies:

- Identification of resident sea turtles
- Determine age structure of resident population
- Habitat use and behavior Methods:

*Surveys will be conducted twice a week (weather permitting)*

Once a sea turtle is caught we untangle them from the net and bring them into the boat for transport to the beach. Once at the beach we begin our monitoring. We take the weight of the turtle, the biometrics (size of the carapace, plastron, and tail), tag them with metal tags (or record existing tag numbers), take a tissue sample (if no pre-existing tags), and record any injuries or abnormalities. Each sea turtle, depending on the size, takes 15-30 minutes to complete the needed monitoring.

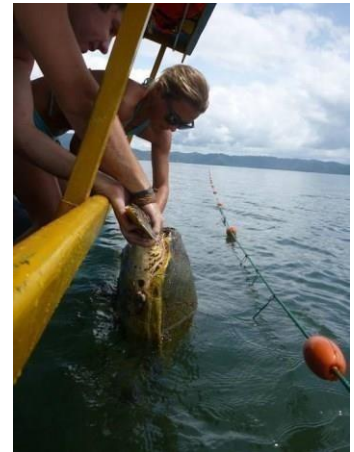
Volunteers will be asked to support in:

- Carrying material and field equipment to the boat and back to the storage
- Keeping the material tidy
- Preparing and organizing the nets
- Untangling deployed nets
- Watching deployed nets to detect a sea turtles which got caught
- Measuring and recording scientific data
- Restraining and carrying of sea turtles

*Note: tasks like tagging and taking tissue samples are exclusively done by our staff or experienced participants to avoid unnecessary injuries.*

## Rescue and Rehabilitation Center:

If we catch a weak sea turtle or receive one from another beach, we will take it to our field rescue center at the project site. Patients are usually very stressed already, the reason why it is very important to be quiet trying to make the patient as comfortable as possible. Part of this is keeping the sea turtle's water clean and the temperature in a reasonable level.



Volunteers are asked to help with:

- Water changing
- Tank cleaning
- Restraining and carrying sea turtles
- Monitoring patients progress
- Helping with removal of barnacles and other parasites
- Measuring and recording scientific data



Keep in mind, having no patients in the rescue center is a good sign. Conditions in captivity are only done if considered to be necessary and follow international and national criteria.

## 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. Since the majority of the mangrove forests along the coast of Playa Blanca have been destroyed, a restoration program was put into place to help restore some of the populations.

Volunteers are asked to support with:

- Collection of seeds and propagules
- Gathering mud for the seeds and seedlings
- Sow seeds into plastic bags in our nursery
- Planting juvenile plants in their natural habitat when they reach a certain size/age
- Maintenance work of the nursery



All activities, except the work in the nursery, depend on the low tide. Consider that you will be working mostly in the mud and sun.

## Sea Grass Monitoring:

Sea grass meadows are a crucial reason why we can find sea turtles in the Golfo Dulce. Not only do they provide food for the green turtles but they also provide ecosystem services that rank among the highest of all ecosystems on earth. Among them are:

- Support to biotic communities
- Stabilization of sediment
- Prevention of shoreline erosion
- Filtering of suspended sediments and nutrients of the water column
- Linked to coral reefs and mangroves
- Support of nutrient cycles
- Cycle nutrients and other chemicals in both sediment and the water column



- Provide habitat for rich faunal assemblages
- Provide recruitment and nursery areas for fish and crustaceans
- Provide crucial food web resources for animals and humans
- Important carbon sink
- Oxygenation of hypoxic sediments
- Natural indicators of water quality

Every three months, we complete a sea grass monitoring study. The study consists simply of counting blades/leaves of different species of sea grass, in an effort to monitor their status.

## Local Community:

Playa Blanca and the surrounding small, rural villages with lots of tradition. The socioeconomic situation and the not easy.

Our philosophy is to involve the local project – making the volunteers' experience much more authentic, cultural, and enjoyable.

In our Osa In-Water project, we are offering different accommodation categories in host families' places or cabins. All of them have become part of our voluntourism project participating in meetings and committing to conservation.



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community in our

## Accommodations and Food:



All our host families offer comfortable accommodations, which include three delicious traditional meals per day. All families have been through a process with LAST committing to the sea turtle conservation with recycling, saving water and other conservation efforts. Not all host families speak English; however, this has never been an obstacle to have a unique and unforgettable experience.

We have four different categories which all include different services and amenities, all which guarantee comfortable rooms or cabins.

### Olive Ridley Category:





These accommodations are located further inland, you will be provided with a bicycle to traveling to and from the project site in Playa Blanca (4km or a 30 minute bike ride). The rooms are basic, and are located in a very calm area surrounded by green and lush nature. This accommodation's rooms are individuals, but with a shared bathroom.



Your meals will be flexible according to your dietary preferences, within the possibilities of your hosts.

### Black Sea Turtle Category:

These cabins and rooms have a maximum capacity of 5 people each, some with private and some with shared bathrooms. They are located less than 1 km from the beach and are right at the main project site. Your meals will be flexible according to your dietary preferences, within the possibilities of your host.



### Leatherback Category:

These rooms has the maximum capacity for 4 people with a private bathroom. They is located directly next to the bus stop and is not far from La Palma (1km or a 5 minute bike ride) or at the beach of Playa Blanca, where the project site is. Your meals will be flexible according to your dietary preferences, within the possibilities of your host.



### Hawksbill Category:



These cabins have the maximum capacity for 4 people. All have a private bathroom. They also present additional amenities like your own TV with SKY-TV and air conditioning. One site is located directly next to the bus stop and is not far from La Palma (3km or a 15 minute bike ride) or Playa Blanca (1km and a 5 minute bike ride), which is where the project site is located.

The second site is located in the town of La Palma (4km or a 20 minute bike ride) and not far from the project site in Playa Blanca. Your meals will be flexible according to your dietary preferences, within the possibilities of your host.

## Rates and Payments:

<b>Accommodation</b>	✓
<b>Food and drinks</b>	✓
<b>Training</b>	✓
<b>Volunteer's Manual</b>	✓
<b>Practical training</b>	✓
<b>Travel costs</b>	NOT included, about \$50
<b>Free time activities</b>	NOT included

Our prices reflect our needs as a non-profit organization dedicated to sea turtle conservation and the improvement of local livelihoods. Rates support our expenses and make possible to provide you the introduction, theoretical and practical training, volunteer's manual, equipment and material for conservation work, environmental education, workshops for socio-economic alternatives, professional assistance, three meals a day, and lodging.

The total fee should be paid before traveling to the project at the LAST office in San José, Tibás. We accept Dollars and Colones (preferably Dollars) but no payment by credit card or travelers checks. If you wish to pay in advance per international bank transfer, let us know and we will provide the necessary information. Please note that bank charges will be added to your final invoice if you choose this payment method.

Travel costs are not included in the fee. Volunteers should plan approximately US\$ 25 for the public bus from San Jose to Osa (one way). For more details please ask our Volunteer Coordinator.

If you are older than 20, have some environmental/biological background, and are available to participate for 3 months, you can apply for one of our Research Assistant positions. Please email the Volunteers Coordinator for more information: [volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com)

## What you can expect from us:

- Three meals a day
- An educational scientific presentation about sea turtles and how to work with them
- Practical training in data collection (how to take measurements, weighing, handling a turtle, etc.)
- Access to staff and biologists for gaining insight professional conservation work
- The opportunity to speak Spanish with the locals and English with the volunteers
- A unique opportunity to gain valuable field work experience in the conservation of endangered species

## What we expect from you:

- You must be in good physical condition, able to work hard and live in basic conditions

- Be open minded, flexible and enthusiastic about hands-on work
- You should know how to swim
- You must have a travel/medical insurance\*
- You must not abuse illegal drugs, drink alcohol during working hours/or work under the influence of them
- You must be 18 or older; volunteers younger than 18 years of age need either a supervisor with you or written permission and liability waiver signed by your parents
- We recommend having basic knowledge of Spanish

*\*The law in Costa Rica (Decreto Ejecutivo 32443-MINAE) demands that every volunteer working should have a health insurance. If MINAE (the Costa Rican ministry for environment and energy) finds out that there are volunteers working without an insurance they will close down the project. Since we don't provide an insurance, volunteers have to get one for themselves (or one through your organization). We have a registration form (kept at the office and project place) where every volunteer needs to give their insurance company and policy number. If volunteers cannot give these details we will have to refuse them the access to our project.*

## Please NOTE:

The idea of working to help save the endangered sea turtles is a very romantic one. The reality is a very different experience. The project in Osa is a research project in a rural community. The surrounding communities are small and traditional, they may appear basic from what you are used to.

Methods like taking tissue or blood samples might appear rough and painful for the turtle. If you do not like to see blood or want to handle a turtle with the needed strength, please do not apply for the project in Osa.

When deciding if this is the type of work you would like to be involved in, please remember:

- There may be times when volunteers will be asked to work more than 30 hours/week, but also times when volunteers don't have a lot to do and have to spend their time on their own.
- The work will continue during rain or otherwise enduring weather patterns.
- Playa Blanca is on the Peninsula de Osa with a tropical climate. This means it is hot with almost 100% humidity; it rains frequently and often heavily. Your cloths and other personal items may suffer under the consequences and will need more maintenance (cleaning and washing) than you are used to.
- There are sand flies and mosquitoes in this area that are unpleasant. Some mosquitoes may carry Dengue fever – don't forget your repellent and anti-itch cream!

- The project is situated in a remote location. Accommodation and food are basic and adapted to the local habits. This also includes the fact that not many local people speak English.
- It is necessary to respect local habits and to consider at all times, that you are in a small village where everybody knows everybody and everything – including you as a volunteer of LAST.
- Working hours in marine conservation project and schedules vary and can change according to the situation/available material/weather/tide or patient.
- Working with the turtles is a brilliant and unforgettable experience, and we can use all help. However, this experience is not for everyone.



## What to bring?

### Documents:

- Valid passport
- A photocopy of the first page of the passport (with photography)
- A copy of the health insurance!

### Clothing:

\* Pack for **hot** weather and **dirty** conditions. Don't bring denim for work clothes only for free time - it **never** dries in tropical humidity.

- Quick dry shorts/ shirts for every day work
- Light weight long sleeve shirt and pants
- Socks and plenty of underwear
- Swimsuits
- Raincoat/poncho and/or umbrella
- Sunglasses and hat
- Quick dry towels
- Footwear:
- Close-toed beach shoes that can get wet, very important for the



- turtle and mangrove work (e.g. crocs or water shoes) •
- Hiking shoes or Tennis shoes/ sneakers •
- Flip flops/ sandals Gear:

\* *Insect repellent and sunscreen are very expensive here; make sure to bring more than you think you will need.*

- Torch/headlamp
  - Extra batteries, or a solar charger with rechargeable batteries
- (recommended)
- Waterproof watch
  - Sunblock (!)
  - Mosquito net and insect repellent (!)
  - Water bottle/s
  - Day backpack or backpack
  - Dry bag (highly recommended)
  - Plastic bag for your backpack should it rain on the boat
  - Snorkel and mask (flippers/snorkel optional) Personal items:
  - Toiletries (biodegradable products are best)
  - Personal first aid kit with personal medication
  - Camera, cell phone, notebook, books, games, snorkel gear (flippers not necessary), instruments, music player etc. **Don't forget, these items are your own responsibility. Humidity, salty air and sand may damage your electronic devices.**
  - Money for transportation, phone calls, souvenirs, other activities

### Things to donate:

*\*It is not mandatory to donate anything, this is just a list of things the project is always in need of should you have extra space in your luggage and wish to assist in an additional way. Many volunteers use things during their stay and then donate them on their departure.*

- Lab tweezers, forceps, pliers
- Scrub or toothbrushes
- Masks, goggles, snorkels
- Old towels/rags
- Pens, pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Scissors, magnets, pencil sharpeners, tacks
- Latex gloves
- Tools (of any kind!); hammers, screwdrivers, nails, etc.

## How to participate:

Volunteers are welcome to join the project all year round. Minimum stay is 7 nights/8 days. To participate, just fill in the online inscription form you get from the Volunteer Coordinator ([volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com)). Before leaving to the project site, please visit our office in San José, Tibás personally. 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 to your host family.

## Other Services:

### Airport pick up:

If you need an airport pick-up we can arrange that for you. Just get in contact with us after booking your plane ticket and send us the airline, flight number and arrival time early enough that we can make the necessary arrangements. Please ask the Volunteer Coordinator about prices and details.

### Stay in San José:

If you come to Costa Rica between Monday and Friday, we can offer you to stay for your first and/or last night(s) at our dorm at the office in San José, Tibás. The room is part of the office which gives you the opportunity to meet and communicate with the people from LAST before going to the project. Meals are not included. Please contact us for rates. Of course, you are free to stay wherever you like during your time here and explore additional options. We can recommend Hostel Gaudys, Hotel Aranjuez and Hostel Pangea, for example.



## Contact Information:

### Asociación LAST

Apdo: 496-1100, Tibás

Costa Rica

América Central Phone: +506-2236-0947

[www.latinamericaseaturtles.com](http://www.latinamericaseaturtles.com)

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

### 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 verde a mano izquierda, con rótulo de tortuga”

**Facebook:** Latin American Sea Turtles (LAST)



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**Twitter:** @widecast1

**Instagram:** last\_widecast

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**WIDECAST**

*Red para la Conservación de las Tortugas  
Marinas en el Gran Caribe*