



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Travel

#### **How to get to Bocas del Toro?**

You can book your international flight to Panama City, Panama or San Jose, Costa Rica. We recommend flying into Panama City. From either city, you can take a bus or flight to Bocas del Toro.

#### **From Panama City:**

**Flight:** Fly with Air Panama on a short 45 minute direct flight to Bocas del Toro (BOC). Please purchase tickets at [www.airpanama.com](http://www.airpanama.com) in advance as they fill up quickly during the high season. Flights leave from Albrook domestic airport (PAC), which is a 30 minute, \$25 cab ride from the international airport or a 10 minute, \$5 cab ride from most hotels/hostels within the city. The cost is approximately \$200-250 roundtrip.

**Bus:** Direct buses to Almirante (port town near Bocas town) leave at daily in the evening around 8pm from Albrook Mall Terminal in Panama City. The bus arrives around Albrook bus terminal, you can take a \$25 taxi ride from Tocumen Airport or a \$5 taxi ride from most hotels/hostels within the city. Make sure to wear pants and bring a jacket, as the bus gets cold. The bus will take you to Almirante. You will get off the bus and take a \$1 cab ride to Bocas Marine Tours. From here you take a \$6 water taxi to Bocas Town. Boats leave every 30 minutes starting at 6 AM. Give & Surf will arrange a time and place to meet you upon your arrival in Bocas Town. The cost is approximately \$25-30 one way.

#### **From Costa Rica:**

**Flight:** Fly with Nature Air direct to Bocas del Toro from San Jose.

**Bus:** The easiest way to travel by bus is with Caribe Shuttle. There is also a public bus that leaves from the Coca Cola Bus Station in San Jose at 9 AM. Purchase the ticket when you get on the bus. You will arrive to the border around 2 PM. At the border you will need to get out and walk across the border to get your passport stamped. \*please

make sure you bring printed proof that you are leaving the country otherwise they will force you to by a return bus ticket. The bus will continue to the Almirante bus station. From here take a \$1 taxi ride to Bocas Marine Tours and get a water taxi to Bocas Town. The last water taxi leaves at 6 PM. We will arrange to pick you up in Bocas town before dark.

### **Where do I get picked up?**

All volunteers will be picked up in Bocas Town upon arrival at the airport or at a predetermined time/place if traveling by bus/boat.

### **Do I need a visa? Any other entry requirements?**

U.S. & Canadian citizens do not need a visa. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months past your trip dates and you must show your exit ticket (flight ticket to leave Panama; a bus ticket is not sufficient). U.S. & Canadian citizens can stay in Panama for 6 months.

For visa and entry requirements for other countries, please check with your country's embassy or consulate.

### **Health & Safety**

#### **Is it safe?**

Yes, Panama City and Bocas del Toro are both safe areas to visit in Panama and Central America. You should however use common sense when traveling in these areas and stay in the tourist areas of town and Panama City. The most frequent crimes are petty thefts and robberies so don't carry a lot of cash or flash valuables around especially after dark.

#### **Do I need medical insurance?**

Yes. We require all volunteers have medical insurance coverage. A great perk of traveling to Panama is that all visitors receive 30 days of free medical coverage within Panama. Visit here to learn more, <http://panama.angloinfo.com/healthcare/health-system/>. We also suggest all volunteers check their international coverage with their medical insurance providers and/or buy travel medical insurance.

#### **What vaccinations do I need?**

Please visit your primary health care physician to discuss your upcoming trip to Panama and to get all of the necessary shots and medication required for your trip. You will want to have a prescription from your doctor outlining all prescriptions and their purpose. You can also visit the CDC's website for a list of recommendations of vaccinations by country.

#### **Malaria Pills?**

Bocas del Toro is a malaria free area of Panama so malaria pills are not necessary.

### **Can I drink the water?**

Yes and no. We don't recommend drinking the tap water in town or in the communities we work as your body may not be accustomed to the bacteria in the local water. You can use the water to brush your teeth, shower, etc. Most restaurants serve filtered water if you ask for a glass of water and there is fresh filtered water provided at the Volunteer House.

### **Panama City Questions**

#### **Where to stay in Panama City?**

Hostels: Luna's Castle, Mamallena's, Panama House, or Casa de Carmen.

Hotels: Principe (downtown), Albrook Inn (next to Albrook Airport), Country Inns, La Estancia, Coconut Lodge

#### **What should I do in Panama City?**

If visiting Panama City there are a number of amazing sights to see and our short list includes the Panama Canal, Casco Viejo, Miraflores Locks, The Fish Market, Amador Causeway, Portobelo, Gatun Lake, and Old City.

### **Room & Board**

#### **Where do I stay?**

Most individual volunteers stay in our Volunteer House located on Bastimentos Island. This picturesque, off-the-grid house is in the rainforest with a beautiful ocean view and just a 10-minute water taxi ride both from Bocas Town and from the communities where we work. The house has solar-powered electricity and rain-water catchment tanks; there is no WiFi and there is limited cell service depending on your service provider. There is a full kitchen, including a stove and refrigerator, so you can store food and prep your meals.

During our busiest times of year, some volunteers may be housed at Fernando's hostel in the Bahia Roja community where we work. This rustic, off-the-grid hostel has solar-powered electricity and rain-water catchment tanks and provides a unique insider's perspective into how the Ngobe communities live.

In both the Volunteer House and the hostel, volunteers are sleeping in dorm-style conditions and sharing a room with other volunteers. If you prefer more private accommodations, we can arrange a private room for you at Bambuda Lodge or another nearby lodge/inn for an additional fee. To arrange this, please email [info@giveandsurf.org](mailto:info@giveandsurf.org).

Group trips will be housed at one of the local hostels or lodges that we partner with. The exact location will be determined by the group size, activities planned, budget, and itinerary.

#### **What do I do about food?**

Lunches are provided as part of your volunteer fees Monday through Friday in the community or town. If you are staying at the Volunteer House, you are responsible for your own breakfasts and dinners. There is a kitchen for you to use and the staff & volunteers travel to town at least twice a week for groceries and errands. Volunteers often taken turns making group meals or cook together and make family-style dinners. It is expected to that all volunteers share responsibilities cooking and cleaning.

### **What if I have food allergies or restrictions?**

You can purchase your own food for your breakfasts and dinners so that shouldn't be a problem. There is a specialty grocery store in Bocas Town, Super Gourmet, that does have some gluten-free products and other select items although the selection is much more limited than you may be used to. During the week, the lunches in the community are usually chicken or fish served with rice & beans and plantains. They are able to make this vegetarian by simply leaving off the chicken or fish, but if you have other allergies/restrictions, we recommend that you pack your own lunch for these days.

### **Is there internet?**

Internet access will be made available regularly (usually Tuesdays & Fridays) in Bocas town for volunteers.

### **Money**

#### **Is there a bank?**

Yes. There is one bank in Bocas, Banco Nacional, where you can withdrawal a maximum of \$500/day. Please make sure your bank knows you are traveling out of the country otherwise they will cancel your card. American dollars are used as the currency in Panama.

#### **How expensive is it?**

Price Breakdowns are as follows

\$4-6 cheap meal; comida tipica

\$10-16 nice meal

\$10-15 hostel dorm bed

\$25-30 private hostel room

\$35 and up nice hotel room

\$1-2 beer, soda, water

\*prices at grocery stores are higher in Bocas town because it is a tourist town and all food travels over by ferry. Fruit and vegetables are inexpensive.

#### **How much extra spending money will I need?**

Not including third party activities (such as snorkel tours, diving, and other excursions) budget roughly \$70-100/week to be spent on breakfasts, dinners, weekend expenses, etc.

### **Free Time, Excursions & Weekends**

### **Where to stay in Bocas town?**

\$10-25/night range: Bocas Surf School and Hostel, Heike Hostel, Tungara Hostel, Mondo Taitu, Hostel Luego, Selina Hostel

\$25-60/night range: Cocomo, Lula's, Tesoro Escondido (outside of town), Pukalani (outside of town)

\$80-200/night range: Hotel Bocas del Toro, El Limbo, Palma Royale

### **What do volunteers do on the weekends?**

Many volunteers decide to spend their weekends in Bocas Town for its nightlife, restaurants, Internet access, access to tours & excursions, and change of pace. Your weekends are free to explore the islands without supervision of a volunteer coordinator. If interested in a particular tour or activity, the volunteer coordinators can assist in arranging this for you. It is important for all volunteers to communicate their interests to the volunteer coordinator so we can arrange your free time.

If you choose to visit Bocas Town on the weekends, you can either stay at a hostel in town or take a water taxi to and from the Volunteer House. Either way, you are responsible for the costs for these outings.

### **Miscellaneous**

#### **Sending things by mail?**

Mail can be received in Bocas town if necessary at Mailbox Etc. Mail is EXTREMELY slow to reach Bocas so we recommend avoiding this if possible.

#### **Where can I get laundry done?**

There are a number of places in town that clean clothes for \$4 or \$5 a load. It usually takes at least a half day to complete so we recommend dropping laundry off on a Friday and picking it up on a Saturday.

#### **Bugs?**

Bugs and critters are part of life in Bocas. We work and live around mangrove forests and in these mangrove forests live sand flies that enjoy the morning and sunset hours looking to annoy volunteers. Bug repellent or lighting a repellent coil will scare them off.

#### **Do I need a cell phone?**

No, you do not unless you would like to stay in touch with people by phone. You can provide your family the cell phone numbers of the volunteer coordinators and they are free to contact us. If you would like your own phone you can purchase a cheap phone in Panama City or Bocas town. If you decide to get a cheap phone during your stay or have a phone that is unlocked we recommend choosing the company Mas Movil. It works

both in the community and in town. Other carriers may only work on the main island. SIM cards can be purchased in Panama City or in Bocas upon arrival.

### **Volunteering Questions**

#### **What does a volunteer's typical schedule look like?**

Volunteers work in the community Monday through Friday usually from 8:30am-1pm followed by lunch together in the community or in town. On Monday afternoon, the staff & volunteers work on the week's lesson plans and curriculum. During the remainder of the week, the volunteers after their afternoons free to surf, explore town, go on tours/excursions, relax on the beach, etc. The volunteer coordinator can help you arrange your activities.

#### **What programs will I be helping with as a volunteer?**

The main programs you will be working with are our education programs: preschool & kindergarten and the elementary school English program during the school year (March-October), and elementary summer school & camp and preschool during the summer break (December to February). Volunteers also have the opportunity to help with other programs depending on their interests; these programs include our teen surf outreach mentorship program, teen & adult English classes, computer literacy classes, and other recreational activities. You may also work on community development projects in the community mainly construction projects.

#### **Can I bring a friend?**

Yes we encourage you to share this experience with your friends and family.

#### **Is there a minimum stay?**

No! We have volunteers join us for as short as a few days up to four or five months.

#### **Can I bring supplies or gifts for the children?**

Yes! A list of recommended items will be sent after registering.

#### **When do I surf?**

During our free time, a lot of volunteers will surf. We get all level of surfers, from first timers to advanced. This is an activity that we typically do in the late afternoons or weekends. Transportation is provided to the main surf breaks on Carenero. For those learning to surf one lesson is provided per volunteer during their stay. Give & Surf has a few surf boards at the Volunteer House that volunteers are welcome to use during their stay or you can bring your own or rent one in town for \$10-20/day.

