



## Volunteer Information Packet

We are excited that you've decided to volunteer with us and want to make sure that we help prepare you for your experience as well as set accurate expectations of what you can anticipate while you're volunteering with us. This information packet will provide you with a good understanding of the environment, living conditions, daily schedule, and other tips for a successful trip.

The key to a successful trip is having an open mind and being flexible & patient! We live in simple, basic conditions in the middle of a rainforest-covered island where weather and wave conditions are unpredictable and ever-changing. Bocas del Toro is a place to escape the fast-paced daily grind of life back home and appreciate the slower pace, natural beauty, and off-the-grid peace.

As a non-profit organization that is committed to empowering the indigenous communities of Bocas del Toro, our primary responsibility is to providing educational programs and services to the Ngobe people we serve. As a volunteer for Give & Surf, you will have the chance to teach, lead activities, and build relationships with the locals. On our free afternoons, we are happy to help arrange excursions and activities for you so that you can enjoy everything that Bocas has to offer, including surfing, hiking, snorkeling, biking, beach trips, and more! Please read the information below to ensure that you're prepared for your trip. We look forward to sharing our world of giving back with you soon! Hasta Pronto!

### **Preparing for you trip:**

- **Passport** – All volunteers will need a valid passport to enter the country. Depending on your country of origin will decide how long you are able to remain in the country. Typically, visitors receive a visa for 6 months upon entry. You also need to show an exit/departure flight ticket upon your arrival in Panama.
- **Health** – 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.
- **Travel Medical Insurance** – Upon entry into Panama all visitors receive 30 days of free medical coverage. Visit [here](#) to learn more:

<http://panama.angloinfo.com/healthcare/health-system/>

- Flight – Please purchase your flight as soon as you have confirmed your volunteer stay with us. It is important to book flights early especially if you decide to fly from Panama City to Bocas del Toro as these flights fill up quickly. Please forward a copy of your flight itinerary as soon as your flight has been confirmed. The cost for the flight from Panama to Bocas is \$100-135 each way but is subject to change based on Air Panama's fares.
- Bus – Some volunteers decide to take the bus from Panama City to Bocas rather than the flight, please contact us in advance with the exact dates so we can ensure a spot for you on the bus. The bus typically costs \$33 each way from Panama to Bocas.
- Money – Panama's local currency is the 'Balboa' but the American Dollar is accepted as equally as the local currency. There is one ATM on the main island that charges a small transaction fee plus any additional fees from your home bank. Please plan accordingly if you plan to pay upon arrival.

### **Packing List:**

- Rain jacket – There is no real rainy season in the rainforest, rain is frequent and can be unexpected. Be prepared by bringing a rain jacket and if you like rain pants.
- Quick dry clothing – With frequent rain showers it is important to have clothes that can dry quickly. This will ensure you are comfortable during your stay with us.
- Day backpack/Dry bags – It is best to be prepared each day by bringing along all necessities. Dry bags help to protect your valuables during those unexpected rain showers.
- Luggage – it is easiest to travel in Bocas with a bag you can carry on your back instead of wheels as the island you will be staying on does not have roads or paved paths to your accommodations.
- Towels – it is smart to bring two towels as things can get damp and you will be spending a lot of time at the beach.
- Sunscreen – the sun is strong and sunburn is never fun, be prepared by bringing sunscreen or purchasing some in town.
- Bug spray – Mosquitoes and sand flies are common here, bring some bug spray to help protect against itchy bites. A whole range of repellants can be found in town from Deet to natural remedies.
- Headlamp/Flashlight – This is essential as your accommodation may not have outdoor lights.
- Beach gear – Don't forget your bathing suit, towel, and surf gear. We spend a lot of time at the beach!
- Hiking boots – Come prepared with hiking boots for any outdoor workdays or hikes through the jungle.
- Toiletries – If you require special brands it is recommended you bring these from home, however most toiletries can be found in town.
- First Aid Kit – Don't forget we are living in the jungle it is best to be prepared!
- Books/Music – There is a lot of down time to relax bring some books and music to pass the time.

- Travel journal/Camera – We are confident you will want to document this experience! Please be sure to tag Give & Surf when posting photos of your experience. We love to share these wonderful memories with you.
- Money- Your volunteer fees cover your accommodations at the Volunteer House, lunches Monday-Friday, and local transportation to & from the communities and town. Depending on your spending habits, you can spend very little (by making your own food and not doing a lot of tour-guided excursions) or you can spend a lot (on nice restaurants, tours, staying in town on the weekends, etc.). On average, we recommend bringing \$150-200 per week for meals (breakfasts & dinners), going out, and a couple of excursions.

### **Accommodation:**

All accommodations are located off the grid and away from regular civilian lifestyle. This means no grocery stores, nightlife, restaurants, and regular internet during the week. This is a basic and rustic environment for those who seek adventure, living simply, and are here to give back to the community.

- Volunteer House – We host short & long term volunteers in our house on Isla Bastimentos. The house has 2 bedrooms, a large main room with dorm-style beds, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and a large deck overlooking the Caribbean. Volunteers will share the main room and/or a bedroom depending on the number of volunteers during your stay. There is limited, solar-powered electricity and limited running water provided from a rain water catchment system. There is no internet. The house is approximately a 10-minute boat ride from Bocas Town as well as from the communities where we work.
- When our Volunteer House is filled, volunteers are housed in a dorm room in a nearby hostel.
- If you prefer more private living quarters with your own room, we can arrange to have you stay at a local hostel, hotel, or B&B for an additional fee. Please email [info@giveandsurf.org](mailto:info@giveandsurf.org) to coordinate this.
- Many volunteers decide to spend their weekends in Bocas town for its nightlife, restaurants, Internet access, 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 coordinator can assist in arranging this for you. These out on the town expenses are not covered by the organization. Hostel rooms are typically \$10-15 for a dorm bed and \$25 for a private room per night.
- If you have time in Panama City before or after your stay in Bocas, we would be happy to make hostel/hotel recommendations.

### **Surfing:**

- The surf conditions are often changing and unpredictable but when they're good, many of our staff & volunteers love to surf! We typically arrange a couple of group surf trips to local breaks during the week after our programs. Volunteers can pay for water taxis to other local breaks and beaches on the weekends or on days when the group isn't going.

- For those learning to surf, one 3-hour lesson is provided during your stay by Mono Loco Surf School.
- We have some surfboards at the Volunteer House for volunteers to use during their stay or you are welcome to bring your own or rent one in town. Board rentals range from \$10-25 per day.

### **Food:**

- Weekly lunches are provided Monday through Friday by the local Ngobe women at their community restaurant. Lunches typically consist of chicken or fish with rice, potatoes, a vegetable, and fruit.
- Breakfast and dinner are the volunteer's responsibility. Food can be purchased in town upon arrival and during regular trips to town for supplies. The Volunteer House has a full kitchen, including refrigerator and stove, for you to prepare food. Often staff & volunteers cook family-style meals together.

### **Transportation:**

- All transport is done by boat. Volunteers should expect to spend a significant amount of time on boats and waiting for boats. You will often find yourself getting caught in the rain and feeling soggy/muddy, but this can be an awesome part of the experience if you embrace it. Additionally, it is important to note that all volunteers must understand we move and work as a group. We cannot individually accommodate the needs and interests of multiple groups of people.

### **Payment:**

- A \$300 non-refundable deposit is required prior to arrival and will be subtracted from the remaining amount owed.
- The remaining amount owed will be paid in cash or by PayPal or check on or before your arrival date.
- There is only one ATM in town with a \$500/day limit so plan accordingly.
- The national currency is the balboa and US dollar. Bills are dollars and coins are either balboas or US minted coins.

### **Supplies for the Programs:**

- If you would like to bring things for the children here is a short list of ideas: construction paper, notebooks, folders, children's books, school supplies, games, books, toys, clothing, arts and crafts, pictures, hair accessories, sporting equipment, coloring books, dry erase markers.

### **Additional Information:**

- If you decide to get a cheap phone during your stay or have a phone that is unlocked we recommend choosing the company +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.
- Call your cell phone provider before traveling abroad to see if your phone will work in Panama and to see what the international fees are.

- Internet access will be made available regularly.
- Laundry can be done in town for a small fee, around \$5 per load.
- If you plan on using a debit or credit card while abroad, notify your bank of your travel plans and make sure that your debit card has a four digit PIN.

**Contact Information:**

In country phone numbers: 6557-5890, 6540-4435, 6743-1688, 6955-6804

Dial from out of the country: 011-507-6557-5890 (incoming calls are free so your family can use this number to get a hold of you if you do not bring your own phone).

Email: [info@giveandsurf.org](mailto:info@giveandsurf.org)