

In order to get the most from your trip, please ensure that you have read and understood all of the information provided, and do not hesitate to contact GVI with any questions. Note that information is regularly updated and reviewed by staff in the field and may be changed without notice. If you would like an updated copy of the information please contact GVI at any time.



Version 14.01

Mexico Marine Expedition - Program 066



Arrival

Please note that arrival logistics may be altered at short notice – check for updates regularly to ensure you are aware of any late changes.

Where do I need to be?

Hotel Colorado in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

When do I need to get there?

10:00 am on the expedition start date.

How do I get there?

Most volunteers arrange international flights to arrive at Cancun International Airport the day before expedition starts. If requested, GVI staff will be at the airport from 6pm onwards, and can help you get to your accommodation (see below).

If you are arriving before the scheduled meeting time you may want to arrange your own transport to Playa del Carmen. ADO Buses to Playa del Carmen are regular and cost roughly US\$12 (an onward taxi will be about US\$2). Please ensure field staff are made aware of your arrival plans.



Pre-Program

Accommodation

Those arriving before the program start date will be responsible for arranging their own accommodation at their own cost. The following are convenient options that participants and staff have used in the past:

Hotel Colorado US\$30-40

Calle 4 entre Av. 20 y 25
Centro Playa del Carmen, Q. Roo
+[52] 9848730381
hotcolora@hotmail.com

Hostal Happy Gecko US\$9

Av 10 entre calle 4 y 6
+[52] 984 147 0692
happygeckohostel@gmail.com

Playa del Carmen Hotel H&A US\$50-60

Av. 20 entre calle 2 y 4
+[52] 984 873 3177
reservas@playa-del-carmen-hotel.de

(Say you're with GVI to get a special rate)



Departure

At the end of the expedition you will be transferred back to Playa del Carmen town centre by approximately 3pm. We recommend you do not book a flight out of Cancun until at least 6 pm, though you may want to leave time to explore a little more.

Please note that neither GVI nor our partners in the field can be held responsible for missed travel connections. You may want to keep plans flexible or allow a day or two after the programme end date before arranging onward travel.



Visa Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct visa for your trip.

Field staff advise that you enter the country using a **tourist visa**.

For most nationalities this doesn't need to be arranged in advance. Check with the immigration authorities of the countries you intend to visit, or see www.inm.gob.mx.



Communications

This program is run by GVI staff in Mexico. Our professional and experienced team will be your primary point of contact when in the field, and will do our best to help resolve issues you encounter and answer your questions.

Primary Contact:

Name: County Director
Tel: +[521] 984 1164 208
Local Tel: (044/045) 984 1164 208
Email: mexico@gviworld.com

Alternative Contact:

Name: Programme Coordinator
Tel: +[521] 984 8762 067
Local Tel: (044/045) 984 8762 067
Email: playaoffice@gviworld.com

GVI 24-hr Emergency Contact:

Tel: +44 208 0903080



Mailing address:
(Post to participants/field staff)

Attn: Cynthia Arochi Z. FAO your name
Apartado Postal 16 Centro
Playa del Carmen, Solidaridad, C.P. 77710
MEXICO



Physical address:
(Delivery of larger items by courier,
e.g. lost luggage)

Attn: Cynthia Arochi Z. FAO your name
Avenida 40 entre calle 8 y 10. dpto.
2A (edificio blanco y cafe)
Centro, 77710
Playa del Carmen
Quintana Roo, Mexico

If your bags go missing in transit, **don't panic!** This does occasionally happen, and you are usually reunited with your belongings within a few days. Consult airline representatives in the baggage claim area. You may be given a file/reference number; it is wise to also ask for a contact telephone number for follow-up.



Keeping In Touch

You will have limited access to long-distance communications whilst on the programme, so make sure friends and family know how often they can expect to hear from you. Participants typically use internet cafes to keep in touch, with access to phone and internet in Tulum about once a week.

Mobile/cell phone reception is limited on base. Reception is more reliable in the town of Tulum.



Living Conditions

Facilities will be more basic than you are accustomed to – please travel with an open mind and a willingness to adapt to local conditions.

Accommodation is in shared (mixed sex) huts with shared bathroom facilities at the field station. There is bottled water available for cooking and drinking only.

Bucket flush toilet facilities are available, and participants share base duties, including cleaning and other chores..



Food

Volunteers take it in turns to prepare meals for the group. Food is a very basic, mostly vegetarian diet, with meat available about once a week. Breakfast could be porridge, fruit or cereal, lunch is beans, vegetables, pasta and sauce, etc. and a typical evening meal may include lentils, pasta, beans, rice and vegetables.



Electricity

Please ensure that you have the correct adaptors for personal electrical items.

Supply: 110V 60Hz

Source: Renewable energy & Generator (there are designated times for charging your electronic items)

Sockets: US style (with earth pin)
US style (no earth)



Laundry

You can wash your clothes on base (hand washing) or take them to Tulum on your day off. Cost is around US\$1.50 per kilo with a minimum charge of around US\$3.75.

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Getting Around

You will be based 45 kilometres (30 miles) away from Tulum and working on coral reefs to the North and South of base and in the nearby communities. Travelling outside the base is reliant on taxis (US\$35.00 return per person on communal taxi).

Travelling around the local area is easy and is best done using public buses with cheap and reliable buses between all major towns.



Exploring Further

In your down time you will be free to travel in the local area and will have two free days per week. In this time you could do daytrips such as visiting Tulum or Coba Mayan ruins, do some cenote diving, visit Playa del Carmen, etc.

Before and after your programme you could go to Merida, Chichen Itza, Chiapas or Central America - the possibilities are endless!



Security

For information about security issues in the country you are travelling to please see the following resources:

UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office:

www.fco.gov.uk

US Government State Department:

www.state.gov/travel

Information for Canadians Abroad:

www.voyage.gc.ca

Australian Government Travel Advice:

www.smartraveller.gov.au

New Zealand Government Travel Advice:

www.safetravel.govt.nz

Whenever travelling you should be aware of the risk of opportunist crime and take common sense precautions to minimise the chance of becoming a victim. The vast majority of visits to Mexico are trouble-free, but if you have any specific questions about your safety and security on the programme please contact GVI.



Finance

Local currency: Mexican Peso

Participants typically spend approximately US\$50-70 per week for phone cards, internet, bottled water, buses, food, drinks, etc. and you may want to bring additional funds to allow for extra activities and travel. For those who want to sample more of the area and Central America before or after the program, we suggest an approximate figure of US\$40-50 per day. Accommodation costs vary, but throughout the Yucatan you can generally expect to pay around US\$15 for a hostel room or to share a basic hotel room.

We recommend that you travel with cash (pesos, US\$ are widely accepted) as your main source of funds, although having a credit/debit card as a backup is wise. The nearest ATM to base is in Tulum. In major towns (Playa del Carmen, Cancun, Merida, Mexico City) ATMs points are widely available. However, be aware that if you travel around small towns in the Yucatan Peninsula ATM points are few and far between!

When budgeting, you might want to know that there are some snacks and drinks for sale at the base.



Shopping

You can find almost all sorts of items (food, toiletries) in Tulum. Dive equipment and more specialized items are better to be found in Playa del Carmen (90km/60mi) or Cancun (150km/100mi).



Background Check

As a service to our partners in the field, and to protect the communities we work, with we require background checks for all participants who will be working unaccompanied with children or vulnerable adults at any point during their placement.

United Kingdom

Criminal Records Bureau Check (CRB)

Australia

Working With Children Check (WWC)

Rest of World

Police Background Check (consult local)

This program does not require a background check. Further information on how to arrange a background check will be sent to you separately where relevant.



Health & Safety

A change of environment, climate, food and lifestyle often results in minor, and occasionally more serious, illness. Please inform staff if you feel unwell at any time.

Please note that GVI cannot provide specific medical advice. Please consult your primary care provider (doctor, GP, etc.) or visit a travel clinic for further information

Please be forthcoming about any health issues **before** you begin the expedition as failure to do so may have serious consequences for you, the staff and other participants, including your removal from the expedition.

If you answer yes to any of the PADI Medical questions it is **essential** that you have a consultation with your doctor and your doctor must sign the form confirming you are fit to dive. It is also recommended that you take a credit card to ensure you can get immediate treatment in the event of a medical emergency (if suitable insurance is held, you will be reimbursed by your insurance company).



Pre Departure Training

Staff in the field will provide training on the skills required, but you may benefit from learning more about local history, culture and customs before you travel.

You will be allocated a study topic 8 weeks before the expedition begins, and will need to purchase one of the following books dependent on your research focus:

- P Humann Reef Coral ID - Florida, Caribbean and Bahamas. (New World Press)
- P Humann. Reef Fish ID - Florida, Caribbean and Bahamas. (NWP)

Access the GVI training resources website on:

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/resources/mexico-training>

Other online resources:

www.pbccrt.org

www.fishid.com/learnctr

<http://coralpedia.bio.warwick.ac.uk>

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Additional Information

Physical fitness: It would be a good idea to build up your physical fitness in the preceding weeks to the expedition. A program that includes a certain amount of aerobic exercise is recommended to achieve an appropriate level of fitness. The work that you will be doing is often physically demanding, and ranges from carrying dive tanks to beach cleans to building projects and all manner of other physical activities.

Diving Requirements: You should receive a PADI Medical Statement from GVI – you can also download a copy from the PADI website (www.padi.com). You **must** answer all the questions regarding your medical history with YES or NO. If you answer yes to any of the questions you are required to have a consultation with a doctor and your doctor must sign and stamp this form. GVI requires that you return to us the original signed medical statement certifying that you are physically and emotionally fit to scuba dive (this must be current, i.e. within 6 months of departure and updated if there are any changes to your status). Please make sure you provide full details on the relevant forms contained within this pack. These should be completed and returned, with your PADI Medical Statement at least 12 weeks before you travel. It is essential that we have the most comprehensive information possible on your medical history / conditions to pass onto medical specialists in the unlikely event of an emergency. If you have any concerns about your diving fitness, or if your doctor needs more information on diving medicine please refer to the following websites. Please take particular note of this if you have any specific medical conditions such as asthma

1. Divers Alert Network (DAN - www.diversalertnetwork.org/join/index.asp?RC=1842280) is a highly respected industry body. The site features over a hundred articles and papers on medical issues facing divers.
2. The Diving Disease Research Centre (www.ddrc.org) has some good articles on diving medical issues and contact details for practitioners at the Centre.

Flying via the United States

Previous volunteers flying through the United States have experienced problems with return flights of longer than 90 days - some airlines treat Mexico as a USA state. If travelling through the US, please check with US immigration authorities and your airline to ensure you have completed any necessary documentation required.

Learning Spanish in Mexico

Although not essential on the expedition base, some knowledge of the Spanish language is useful when travelling around the region. If you are interested in spending a week or two in Mexico learning Spanish before your expedition, please contact your program coordinator for information about courses nearby.

Most days you will be up with the sun, around 6am, to help prepare base for the day. Everyone helps to keep the base running smoothly by filling tanks, manning the radio and taking it in turns to clean, cook, tidy the grounds, prepare the boats, and relax in the hammocks!

If you are interested in doing your rescue and/or Dive master course check with your Country expert about the options.

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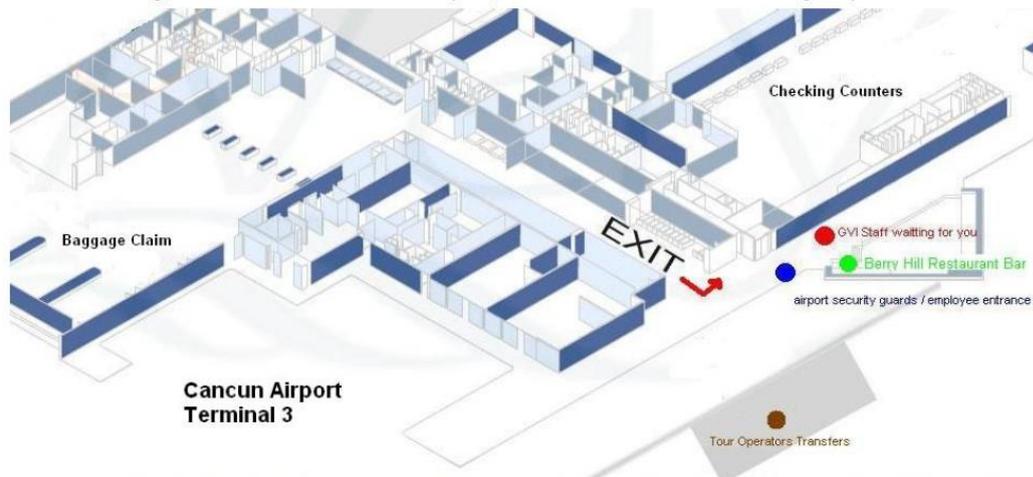
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Cancun airport

There are three terminals in Cancun airport, many taxi drivers and tour operators will try to get you to go with them, some of them can charge a lot so ask around for prices. The cheapest option is to take the ADO bus which runs every hour from 8am to 10pm (the schedule varies depending on the season www.ado.com.mx).

Terminal 3, International arrivals- as you leave the exit gate you will see many taxi drivers and tour operators in front of you, continue straight forward and you will find the ADO bus. If you arranged to be picked up by GVI staff don't go straight forward, take your left towards where the family and friends are waiting, there is a restaurant called Berry Hill, staff with GVI t-shirt will be waiting for you there.



Terminal 2, mainly national and charters flights- if you arrive to terminal 2, there are two exits and many options of transportation. If you have arranged staff from GVI to pick you up explicitly in terminal 2, they will be waiting inside the terminal, at the restaurant, in front of the boarding gates. If you did not specify the terminal, please make your way to terminal 3 to meet GVI staff at Berry Hill Restaurant, there are airport shuttles available.



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Please note that this kit list is intended to help you pack for your trip but should not be taken as a comprehensive or compulsory list of items to take. Some people are comfortable travelling lighter than others, and there may be some items which you feel you can survive without. If travelling alone you should ensure you can carry all your belongings for a short distance without assistance.

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Essential Equipment

These are items which staff in the field have deemed as required, or which previous volunteers all agree are must-haves. Check the boxes as you pack!

1 Large Rucksack (Backpack): (65+ litres / 4,000+ cubic inches) for use throughout the expedition (preferable to a suitcase or hold-all).

1 Daypack (Backpack): (25+ litres / 1,500+ cubic inches)

Mask and Snorkel A tempered glass mask is recommended. For wearers of glasses / contact lenses: Glasses and hard contact lenses cannot be worn beneath a mask, so we would recommend a prescription mask. Hard lenses are not suitable for diving as they do not allow the air through. A cheaper alternative is to use soft or disposable contact lenses, although be aware that you have to shut your eyes when mask clearing. Bring spare mask clips and strap.

Fins There are two choices, moulded slip on fins or strap fins. It depends on personal choice. They need to be comfortable as you will dive every day and blisters can be very painful. Moulded fins do not require wet suit boots and are also less expensive. If you decide to bring strap fins, then please bring spare clips and straps. Getting to the boats means walking through seagrass and stones, as such some volunteers prefer to wear boots.

Wetsuit The water temperature is normally 24-30°C and GVI recommend a full length wetsuit (3mm body, 2mm arms and legs). However if you feel the cold you may prefer a 5mm suit for the winter months and if you do not feel the cold you may prefer a shorty or no wetsuit for the summer months.

Waterproof watch A watch or other timing device for diving is essential to keep track of your bottom time. GVI does not have a collection of underwater timing devices. Members will not be able to dive without one.

Inflatable Surface Marker Buoy with spool reel (at least 30 meter long line). A Delayed Surface Marker Buoy (DSMB) is an important piece of dive safety equipment. Ideally you will not have to use it but is important that you have it with you on every dive. They can be expensive but look for the cheaper versions. Please don't bring the permanent ones, but bring the ones which will blow up during the safety stop. Ask at a dive shop.

Shorts board shorts or baggies are great, quick drying items. Also an alternative for diving in during the summer months.

Swimwear Ideally two or three costumes/pairs of trunks, one of which should be suitable for wearing beneath a wetsuit. You will be spending most of your time in your swimwear, so spares are highly recommended! Rash vests (rashies) are also very useful and in summer days you can use them instead of wet suits.

T-shirts an essential! Quick drying, lightweight materials for shirts or t-shirts. Avoid holes to prevent insect visitors.

Sandals (flip-flops / thongs) are strongly recommended.

Water proof jacket as in all tropical countries, storms and sudden showers occur often.

Towel an old and worn towel will dry more quickly, or you can buy a quick-drying travel towel. A sarong is definitely a useful extra.

Sunglasses Good quality sunglasses are essential - make sure they offer 100% UV protection. Cheap glasses can cause more damage than good.

Sun hat the sun is very strong. A hat is essential. For winter months a beanie could be useful

Insect repellent Unfortunately every paradise has its downside. The sandflies, mosquitoes, and horse flies can be a pain in Mexico. Baby oil also helps to reduce bites. Boots natural 'Mosiguard' (DEET free) is recommended against mosquitoes. Insect repellents are available locally but it is best to make sure you have a decent supply with you as you won't be able to live without it! Try to get a biodegradable one if possible.

Certification cards Copies of any certification/qualifications that may be relevant e.g. scuba diving, boat driving, driving licence, first aid, radio operator, vaccinations etc. Any valid student cards/internationally recognized discount I.D. cards

Photocopies It is ESSENTIAL to photocopy all important documents before leaving home, such as passports, air tickets, insurance certificate, medical forms, receipts for traveler's cheques and serial numbers if you bring them.

Any prescribed medication you need during your trip. Make sure it bears your name and description of reason and dosage.

Sun cream high factor, at least SPF25/30+ or 45+ if you are very pale skinned. Please ensure it is water resistant and biodegradable preferably

Torch/Flashlight (you will use this A LOT!) A head torch is recommended, ones with LED bulbs tend to be a lot more efficient with batteries. Bringing a spare as backup is also recommended. Red filter is needed if you come between May & October due to turtle nesting season.

Mosquito net bring a fine mosquito net to fit a 3ft wide bed. A single bunk bed and box net styles are better than wedge shaped ones. A net treated with DEET will be more effective and a 'Kathmandu' net will also help to keep out sand flies.

Bedding bed sheets x 2 (fitted ones are better), pillow cases x 2. In general you will find that bed sheets are enough however temperatures can drop at night in winter so either bring a sleeping bag or you can buy a nice Mexican blanket locally for about \$5.

Stationery you will need a notebook and pen for lectures and self studying

Water bottle

Warm clothing a fleece or warm jumper or sweater is ideal. From November to March the temperature drops at night.

Long-sleeved clothing as in all tropical countries, insects can be a nuisance in Mexico, especially in the evening. Long sleeved shirts and trousers/pants offer the best form of protection. Be aware that the colour blue may attract mosquitoes.

Highly Recommended Equipment

Camera a good dry box or bag filled with lots of silica gel will help to prevent humidity damaging your equipment.

Money belt/bum bag/fanny pack

Optional Equipment

Dry bags offer excellent waterproofing for clothing and kit.

Diving computer Not an essential item. All dives are planned using the RDP tables. If you are considering purchasing a diving computer, it may be worth looking in a dive magazine to research the best value options.

Batteries and spare bulbs can be purchased in Playa del Carmen



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- Vitamin tablets** We will always try to ensure that fresh fruit and vegetables form a part of the regular meals supplied, however, you may also wish to bring a supply of vitamin supplements with you. Other Team Members have suggested natural antiviral / antibacterial products, e.g. oil of oregano, garlic oil, emergency vitamin C.
- Sewing kit**
- iPod / Mp3 Player / World Service Radio** with headphones for personal use or travel speakers
- Binoculars**
- Travel games / Cards**
- Books** some novels have been left at camp by others.
- Snacks / sweets** luxuries from home that you may miss - English teabags, chocolate, Marmite, etc.
- Herbs & Spices** there is a selection on base, but if you have any preferences you're welcome to bring more!
- Favourite DVDs** for movie nights
- Electrical adaptor** to convert both socket style and voltage if necessary (US sockets).
- Para cord** x 20m
- Bungees** – very useful for washing lines, hanging things in your room etc.
- Work gloves** a pair of cheap suede or leather garden work gloves for maintenance work around the base camp, beach cleans, community projects, etc.
- Pen knife / Leatherman**

Many of these items can be purchased in Mexico. Playa del Carmen is a fast developing city, with most facilities and shops that you can think of. However, you'll need time to do any shopping you require, so please schedule this into your itinerary. You may prefer to have everything sorted before you depart for Mexico.

Hints on Buying Kit

The climate is hot and humid and shorts and T-shirts are essential. You won't need very many clothes as you will spend most of the time in your swimwear and sarongs, but do pack a few items for those evenings out! Sandals or flip flops/thongs are also strongly recommended. Even outside the rainy season, short bursts of rain are not uncommon and so some form of lightweight waterproof clothing is also recommended. It can also get cold in the evenings in the winter months so a fleece or jumper is recommended. As in all tropical countries, insects can be a nuisance in Mexico, especially in the evening. Long sleeved shirts and trousers offer the best form of protection. We also recommend bringing either trainers or walking boots to help cover your feet in the evenings to protect them from the mosquitoes and sand fly bites. Walking boots or wellies are strongly recommended if you want to do any off road walking or trekking.

Before setting off in search of your essential kit, compile a list of everything that you need. When buying your kit you may find that by mentioning to the store assistants (or ideally the manager) that you are joining a volunteer project enables you to negotiate a discount on your purchases. Often stores are authorised to offer a discount (typically 10-15%) at their discretion, so it is always worth mentioning that the kit is required in aid of a good cause.

Shop around for kit. If you are never going to use items again then it is not worth going for the top brands! Cheap lightweight clothing is sometimes just as good if not better. Remember that clothes will get damaged and very dirty!

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