

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.



CO134 Mexican Marine Conservation and Scuba Diving Internship

Version 09.11



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?

7:15am 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. 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. Buses to Playa del Carmen are regular and cost roughly US\$9 (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 Playa US\$15-20

Calle 8 entre Av 20 y 25
+[52] 984 803 3277
info@hostelplaya.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



Departure

At the end of your placement you will be transferred back to Playa del Carmen town centre by approximately 9:30pm. We recommend you do not book a flight out of Cancun until the following day.

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 programme 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: Daniel Ponce-Taylor
Tel: +[521] 984 1164 208
Local Tel: (044/045) 984 1164 208
Email: dan@gviworld.com

Alternative Contact:

Name: Cynthia Arochi Zendejas
Tel: +[521] 984 8762 067
Local Tel: (044/045) 984 8762 067
Email: mexico@gviworld.com

GVI 24-hr Emergency Contact:

Tel: +[44] (0) 7960 820 695



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
Calle 6 con Av 25. Apartamento 3
(arriba de Auditoria del Estado)
Centro, Playa del Carmen
Solidaridad, C.P. 77710
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 Mahahual about once a week.

Mobile/cell phone reception is not available on base.



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..

During the second part of the Program (approx. weeks 12-24) you will be based at your dive centre placement in shared accommodation. The exact location will be discussed with you during your program.



Food

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

Please note you are responsible for your own food expenses during the 2 week break, and throughout your Divemaster training and subsequent dive centre placement.



Electricity

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

Supply: 110V 60Hz
Source: Generator (evenings only)
Sockets: US style (with earth pin)
US style (no earth)



Laundry

You can wash your clothes in base (hand washing) or take them to Mahahual on your day off. Cost is around US\$1.5 per kilo.

UK & Europe

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Getting Around

You will be based 40 kilometres (25 miles) away from the village of Mahahual and working on coral reefs to the North and South of base and in the nearby communities. Travelling outside the base is reliant on field staff and taxis (US\$20.00 return per person for a communal taxi to Mahahual).

Travelling between major cities in 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 one and a half free days per week. In this time you could do daytrips such as visiting Tulum or Coba Mayan ruins, do some cenote diving, visit Cancun, Mahahual, Chetumal, Bacalar, 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\$40-50 per week for calling 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. Please note that during the 2nd part of your internship, the dive shop placement, you are responsible for purchasing your own food, and so should budget accordingly.

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!

Shopping



You can find almost all sorts of items (food, toiletries) in Mahahual town. Dive equipment and more specialized items are better to be found in Chetumal (130 km/80miles away) or in Playa del Carmen (300 km/186 miles from Mahahual).



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.

The nearest emergency medical facilities are located in the nearest town (40 kilometres away from base). For major emergencies volunteers are taken to Playa del Carmen. We have emergency procedures for all foreseeable events, the staff is first aid trained and you will receive a safety briefing on arrival.

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 e-learning tool on
www.gvimexico.blogspot.com

Other online resources:

www.pbccrrt.org

www.fishid.com/learnctr

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

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info@gvi.co.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 Expedition Members 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.

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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)
- Dry bags** offer excellent waterproofing for clothing and kit.
- 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, moulder 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.
- Wetsuit** The water temperature is normally 26-30°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.
- Diving knife and/or line cutter** most dive centres require you to have a small diving knife when on your placement - however some of the dive shops work within the marine reserves, where dive knives are not allowed, so we recommend you bring a small line cutter, which is allowed in marine reserves.
- PADI NDL Tables** this table is required material when you are completing your Dive Master part of your internship. You should have it from your Open water course.
- Pocket Mask** basic rescue item to have when diving. DAN make the most common ones.
- Dive slate** you will need this when you get to your dive placement.
- Underwater compass** a wrist compass is a basic Divemaster tool, and some dive centres require all their interns to have their own personal one.
- Inflatable Surface Marker Buoy with spool reel** 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.
- Shorts** board shorts or baggies are great, quick drying items.
- 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!
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Work gloves** a pair of cheap suede or leather garden work gloves for maintenance work around the base camp, beach cleans, community projects, etc.
- Insect repellent** Unfortunately every paradise has its downside. The sand 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!
- Flannel or wash cloth** for bucket showers.
- 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.
- 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
- 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.
- 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 and drinking cup**

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Highly Recommended Equipment

- Camera** a good dry box or bag filled with lots of silica gel will help to prevent humidity damaging your equipment.
- Pen knife / Leatherman**
- Money belt/bum bag/fanny pack**

Optional Equipment

- Diving computer** Not an essential item, but can be useful to monitor depth and bottom time to ensure you dive within the plan parameters. 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
- 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
- Binoculars**
- Plastic and re-sealable bags** to keep things dry in those humid conditions!
- Warm clothing** a fleece or warm jumper or sweater is ideal.
- 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 DVD** for Sunday night movies
- Electrical adaptor** to convert both socket style and voltage if necessary (US sockets).
- Duct tape**
- Para cord** x 20m
- Bungees** – very useful for washing lines, hanging things in your room etc.

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.

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