



Mexico Puerto Morelos Marine

Safety and support for all program participants is paramount for Freepackers. This field manual serves as your go-to guide when preparing to depart on your adventure, including a packing list, further details on health and safety, arrival information, suggested preparatory reading (where relevant), and more.

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.

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. For those planning on staying beyond the maximum number of days allotted on a normal tourist visa (180 days) or undertaking further courses with the NGO, please make sure you ask your Country Expert the details on how to obtain the appropriate visa for your stay and approximate associated costs. Please be aware that you are responsible for having the correct visa and any costs incurred in obtaining it.

Keeping in Touch

You will have limited connection whilst on the programme due to daily activities. Participants typically buy a SIM card for their cell phones or buy a cheap cell phone once here. Mobile/cell phone reception is available on base depending on your phone carrier. Alternatively, you can also use internet in cafes or restaurants in Puerto Morelos to keep in touch. Please advise loved ones accordingly.

For Divemaster and IDC/MSDT interns going to the dive shop:

No reception at the dive shop placement. Reception is more reliable in the town of Tulum or Mahahual. Wifi is available at the dive shop.

Please note that the postal service is not that reliable in Mexico, so normal delivered parcels can take over 2 months to be delivered. If using a courier service like FEDEX they will not deliver to a post box so please use the physical address. Also some items might get held in customs and you will have to pay taxes in order to be delivered e.g. dive equipment, electronics, food, medications, old clothes, etc.

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.

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) dorm rooms with shared bathroom facilities. There is bottled water available for cooking and drinking only. Cold water for showering and flush toilet facilities. Participants share base duties including cooking, cleaning, gear and equipment maintenance, and other chores.

For Divemaster and IDC/MSDT interns going to the dive shop

Facilities at the dive shop placement are with running water, electricity and flushing toilets, but not always. Accommodation is in shared house with basic kitchens.

Food

Volunteers prepare their own breakfast from our choice of cereals. During work days lunch and dinner is prepared by a local cook, on weekends participants cook their own meals. 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. Local restaurants are also an option at your own cost during weekends.

For Divemaster and IDC/MSDT interns going to the dive shop

Food is not included whilst at the dive shop. Cooking facilities and restaurants are available. Although there are small convenience stores in Xcalak, they might not have much variety on groceries. If you require special food such as gluten or lactose free products, make sure you get them before arriving to the dive shop. There is a veggie truck that goes to town every other day.

Electricity

Supply: 110V 60Hz

Source: National Grid

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

Bringing and storing valuables is a personal choice for each volunteer, staff cannot provide insurance or safe storage for valuable items (i.e. laptops etc.) – volunteers are responsible for looking after them.

Laundry

You can wash your clothes on base (hand washing) or take them to Puerto Morelos town on your day off. Cost is around US\$2.50 per kilo with a minimum charge of around US\$3.75. In Xcalak, cost is around US \$3.75 per kilo.

Getting Around and Exploring Further

You will be 2.5 kilometers (1.59 miles), over an 15 minutes away from downtown Puerto Morelos within the National Park Reefs of Puerto Morelos. Travelling outside of base is reliant on taxis, minimum US\$15 one way per taxi to downtown Puerto Morelos. Larger taxis are cheaper depending on number of people going out. Public transport is easy and relatively cheap, travelling regularly between major towns.

In your down time you will be free to travel in the local area and will have 2 free days per week. Every 4-week volunteers get a 3 day weekend. In your time off 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!

Divemaster and IDC/MSDT Interns going to the dive shop:

During the dive shop placement, you will be based in Xcalak National Marine Park located about one hour away from Mahahual. Travelling to the nearest town can only be done by bus or taxi. Taxi charges around US\$40 one way.

Please note that during the dive shop placement you will have one day off per week only. Places to visit nearby: Bacalar, Mahahual, etc.

Finance

Local currency: Mexican Peso

Participants typically spend approximately US\$70-100 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\$25 for a hostel room or to share a basic hotel room. We recommend that you travel with cash (pesos, US\$ are widely accepted) in bigger towns as your main source of funds, although having a credit/debit card as a backup is wise. The nearest ATM to base is in downtown, and there are two banks in the urban side of town. 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.

Divemaster and IDC/MSDT Interns going to the dive shop:

During the dive shop placement participants typically spend approximately US\$200-300 per month in food depending how much you cook and how much you spend on drinks. There are no ATMs available in Xcalak.

Marine Conservation Divemasters (MXPM0179N):

If you are joining your Divemaster in September, please be aware that the base will be closed during Christmas/New Years. During this time you will need to budget for your own food and accommodation. Many interns use this time to travel

and explore the local area. Please talk to your Country Expert for further details.

Background Check

A background/police check is required for this program

Health & Safety

Please note that the NGO 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. 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).

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.

Expedition Participants:

Your doctor must sign the PADI & medical forms confirming you are fit to dive if you answer YES to any of the questions on the form.

For all Divemaster and IDC/MSDT Interns:

Your doctor must sign the PADI & medical forms confirming you are fit to dive. It is a requirement for your program to bring the PADI medical form signed by a doctor, even if you answered NO.

Pre Departure Training

Please make sure you have indicated if you have a diving certificate and number of dives prior to your arrival.

Staff in the field will be training you in diving and science skills required for the program activities. It will really help your progression if you study before you get here - it makes such a difference. You will be allocated either fish or coral to study 8 weeks before the expedition begins. Some resources are:

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

P Humann. Reef Fish ID - Florida, Caribbean and Bahamas. (NWP)

Packing List

Essential Equipment

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

- **Large Rucksack** (Backpack): (65+ litres / 4,000+ cubic inches) for use throughout the expedition (preferable to a suitcase or hold- all)
- **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 to use soft or disposable contact lenses (although be aware that you have to shut your eyes when mask clearing) or a prescription mask. 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 may mean walking through seagrass and stones, as such some volunteers prefer to wear boots.
- **Wetsuit** The water temperature is normally 24-30°C and we 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 to at least 100m** A watch or other timing device for diving is essential to keep track of your bottom time. Members will not be able to dive without one and buying timing devices in Mexico can be pricey.
- **Delayed Surface Marker Buoy (DSMB) with finger reel (at least 40 meter long line).** A Delayed Surface Marker Buoy (DSMB) is an important piece of dive safety equipment. It is important that you have it with you on every dive. Please don't bring the permanent ones, bring the ones which will blow up during the safety stop. Ask at a dive shop or buy it in Playa or Cancun.
- **A4 Underwater Slate** and attachment clip used for communicating underwater and collecting monitoring data.
- **Dive Logbook** (if you are already a qualified diver) to prove the number of dives you have done.
- **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.
- **Sandals (flip-flops / thongs)** are strongly recommended.
- **Water proof jacket** as in all tropical countries, storms and sudden showers occur often.
- **Towel** A sarong is definitely a useful extra.
- **Sunglasses** Good quality sunglasses are essential - make sure they offer 100% UV protection.
- **Personal first aid kit**
- **Sun hat** A hat is essential. For winter months a beanie could be useful
- **Certification cards** Copies of any certification/qualifications that may be relevant e.g. scuba diving, boat driving, driving license, 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.
- **Any prescribed medication** you need during your entire trip. Make sure it bears your name, 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 reef safe and 100% biodegradable (can buy on route to base if unable to source from home). Insect repellent for mosquitoes and sand flies, get deet free eco-friendly sprays, also get eco-friendly shampoo, conditioner and any other cosmetic products.
- **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 very fine mosquito net to fit a 3ft wide bed. A single bunk bed and box net styles are better than wedge shaped ones.
- **Bedding bed sheets/mattress cover** (1 fitted and 1 loose top sheet) and pillow case. 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 \$10.
- **Stationery** you will need a notebook and pen for lectures and self studying
- **Water bottle** metal water bottles are recommended as they are environmentally friendly and last longer.
- **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.

Highly Recommended Equipment

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

Optional Equipment

- **Dive Computer** Not an essential item for expedition volunteers. 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.
- **Dry bags**
- **Sewing kit**
- **iPod / Mp3 Player / World Service Radio** with headphones for personal use or travel speakers
- **Travel games / Cards Books** some novels have been left at camp by others, but you can always contribute to the stock.
- **Favourite DVDs** for movie nights
- **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!

- **Electrical adaptor** to convert both socket style and voltage if necessary (US sockets).
- **Bungee cord** – very useful for washing lines, hanging things in your room etc.
- **Pen knife / Leatherman**
- **Batteries and spare bulbs** can be purchased in Playa del Carmen Computer can be useful if you have brought a camera and would like to update photos or when you are off base for the weekend using the internet in a coffee shop or hotel.
- **Laptop computer** can be useful if you have brought a camera and would like to update photos or when you are off base for the weekend using the internet in a coffee shop or hotel.
- **Work gloves** a pair of cheap suede or leather garden work gloves for maintenance work around the base camp, beach cleans, community projects, etc

Divemaster & IDC/MSDT Interns Essential Equipment:

- **Diving computer** is highly recommended however if you do not have one you must have a timing device. If you would prefer to use a computer, you can rent them during your DM working placement at half price (\$5 per diving day)
- **Pocket Mask** basic rescue item to have when diving. DAN make the most common ones.
- **Underwater compass a wrist compass** is a basic Divemaster tool, and the dive centre require all their interns to have their own
- **Diving knife and/or line cutter** since you will be working on a Marine park the diving knife can not be longer than 6 inches including the blade and hilt
- **2 photos**, passport size, for your Divemaster application.

Purchasing Personal Equipment

If you are planning to purchase personal diving equipment please be advised to purchase only recreational diving items, not Technical Diving equipment. Please notice that the decision is entirely yours and we won't take responsibility if any of the listed brand fails, we are only sharing some brands that have worked fine for our volunteers in the past.

Dive computers Suunto Zoop or Viper or the Mares Puck.

Regulators Full set including analog Submersible Pressure Gauge. Please avoid purchasing regulators that have a wireless transmitter. If this item has already been purchased please make sure to bring an analog SPG so that it can be installed along side the transmitter for safety purposes.

Some brands to look for:

Scubapro MK 25 with R295/395 second stage & S600 Alternate second stage.

Mares MR 12 with Axis second stage or Mares Prestige 12 S

Bouyancy control device (BCD) If purchasing a brand new BCD for the first time, please keep in mind you want it to fit you nicely and is practical for use here in Akumal. NO TECHNICAL WING BCD'S if your planning to complete the Open Water or Advanced Open Water courses. If you are already an Advanced Open Water diver and looking to continue your Diving education a Wing style BCD is ok as long as you have already used one in the past.

Some brands to look for when purchasing a BCD for the first time:

CRESSI: Start Jacket Style BCD

SCUBAPRO: T-Force Jacket Style BCD

SCUBAPRO: Pilot Jacket Style BCD

MARES : Dragon (for men) Kayla (for women) Jacket Style BCD.

Additional Information

Weather: On bad weather days when we are unable to dive you will receive extra science lectures, science training, dive theory and ID workshops; conduct beach cleans; watch documentaries and/or catch up on course work.

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 the NGO – you can also download a copy from the PADI website (<https://www.padi.com/english/common/courses/forms/pdf/10063-ver2-0.pdf>). 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. NOTE: DIVEMASTER INTERNS AND IDC/MSDT INTERNS MUST HAVE THEIR MEDICAL FORM SIGNED BY A DOCTOR. This is mandatory and it needs to be current (i.e. within 6 months of starting your Divemaster course), otherwise you cannot start your training. If

you go to a non diving doctor you should take the guidelines as well as the form, to ensure he/she understands what he/she is signing off on. The NGO requires that you return to us the original signed medical statement certifying that you are physically and emotionally fit to scuba dive (again this must be current 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 great source of information for any medical questions pertaining to diving you may have.

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 Country Expert for information about courses nearby.

General additional information:

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 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 Divemaster course check with your Country Expert about the options.

Cancun airport

There are four 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).

Exit the arrival terminal and continue straight ahead to the ADO bus stop (ignore the taxi drivers and tour operators). You can purchase a ticket there.

Pick up

We use a licensed private transfer company named Olympus Tours. If you requested a transfer with your programme expert and got **confirmation of it**. Please contact Olympus tours module or outside the airport there will be a representative with your name on their list and will be waiting for you even if your flight is delayed. Olympus Tours module and staff are easy to recognize as they wear an orange and white uniform with the logo of Olympus on it. If you have any trouble finding them you can contact us at any or the phone numbers above. *Please be aware that other companies might say that they have left so you pay them for their transportation service.*