



Intern/Volunteer FAQ

About our companies

Ecorana Environmental is a Canadian-based eco-travel and environmental education company that specializes in designing and organizing low-cost applied learning holidays for students, researchers, and eco-tourists. Ecorana has a formal partnership with **T.R.E.E.S (Toucan Ridge Ecology and Education Society)** in Belize to offer their clients a truly unique experience living in the rainforests of the Maya Mountains at the T.R.E.E.S Hosting Center, a registered tourism facility. T.R.E.E.S is a grassroots not-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of Belize's natural and cultural heritage through scientific research, education, local capacity building, and creating income-generating and other community projects that increase the well-being of the people and their surrounding environment.

All of the internships and volunteer projects based out of the T.R.E.E.S Hosting Center are geared towards conservation of the flora and fauna of this extremely biodiverse area, and/or improvement of the lives of the nearby community members. Interns and volunteers play a large role in helping Ecorana and T.R.E.E.S meet their objectives thus you can be assured that your efforts and internship/volunteer fees are used directly to cover the costs of creating/running the internships with any profit going directly to sustaining the local not-for-profit programs.

What is the total cost the internship/volunteership?

Internships

Internship rates vary depending on the type of internship

Price breakdowns are as follows:

- *Generalist wildlife ecology interns* receive basic training on a combination of wildlife ecology sampling techniques (mammals, birds, herps), work independently on own projects of choice, and also help occasionally with other ongoing farm, trail, or field station maintenance projects:
 - \$329 USD (incl. hotel tax) per week
- *Bird and bat mist-netting focused interns* receive specialized focused one-on-one training on mist-netting and banding/processing with certified trainers, can work independently on own projects of choice, but are not required to help on farm, trail, or field station maintenance projects (though may if desired).
 - \$379 USD (incl. hotel tax) per week

Volunteerships

Volunteers assist on our organic farm, on cleaning and cooking and maintaining our facilities, trails, and grounds. Some volunteers with skillsets in areas like marketing, education, yoga, etc. are also encouraged to apply their skills in our community.

- \$184 USD (incl. hotel tax) per week

For both internships and volunteerships, fees include the following:

- Lodging in shared cabins (maximum of four same-sex interns to a bunk-house room in a bunkhouse of mixed males and females)
- Three meals a day Monday through Friday and/or access to communal kitchen facilities and supplies for self-catering (Monday through Sunday)
- Access to all facilities including bathrooms with flush toilets, hot showers, 24-hour electricity, a computer workstation and Wifi (limited use 100 mb per day), all supplies/materials/equipment required for the internship, as well as training by local experts.
- All bedding is provided but interns/volunteers are expected to bring their own towels and other bath essentials. Depending on other groups on site and field station capacity, interns may need to move accommodations during their stay (i.e., from bunkhouse to tents, etc.).

What are the registration steps?

- 1) After you have submitted your application via our website, we will contact you within a week to let you know if we consider you to be a suitable candidate for the position. If you are short-listed for the position and can confirm that you are available for the dates we suggest, we move forward with the registration.
- 2) Once selected, we will send you a registration package which includes:
 - Intern Agreement Contract
 - Guest information form (includes information on medical insurance coverage, emergency contact info, and food and other allergies)
 - Deposit/Cancellation/Payment form
 - A waiver release form
 - Invoice
 - If not already provided during the application period, FAQs on the following: Travelling to T.R.E.E.S, Travelling to Belize, and Internship/Volunteerships General FAQ
- 3) All forms need to be filled out, signed (electronic signature will suffice), scanned (unless using e-signature), and sent back to us by email to: registration@ecorana.ca
- 4) You will need to pay a reservation deposit of \$75 USD (information on this deposit is included in the form that we will send you) and will need to notify us of how you would like to make the payment. We will then send you the necessary information for allowing you to make the payment.
- 5) You will be sent an email confirmation stating that we have received your reservation deposit and your position will be held.
- 6) You will be reminded 60 days prior to the internship/volunteer position start date and will receive an invoice at this time detailing the total amount owing for the position. You can choose to pay 50% deposit at this time, or the full amount if you wish. Payment instructions will be provided at that time depending on how the intern desires to pay – via credit card, PayPal, wire, or personal cheque.
- 7) **The full amount of the internship/volunteership for the agreed upon time period MUST be paid in advance BEFORE ARRIVAL and your placement is not confirmed until receipt of payment in full. There are no exceptions to this policy.**

What do I need to know about traveling to the Field Station?

Traveling to Belize

In order to make your trip to Belize go as smoothly as possible, we suggest the following tips!!!

Persons entering Belize are NO longer required to download and complete the Belize Health App prior to arrival BUT you still must book a stay at the Gold Standard Hotel and present confirmation at immigration. You are required to complete the Customs and Immigration form that is provided to you on your flight to Belize. We can also provide a letter of reservation confirmation prior to travel.

Effective August 19th, 2021, ALL travellers, both vaccinated and unvaccinated, entering Belize through the International Airport from other countries will be required to present a negative COVID-19 Test. A negative result of a Covid- 19 PCR test taken within 96 hours of ARRIVAL in Belize or a negative rapid test from any approved Antigen Rapid Test taken within 48 hours of ARRIVAL is required. If no test is presented, a COVID-19 test will be administered at the airport for a fee of \$50 USD per passenger. Children under 5 are not required to present a negative test.

Effective February 15th, 2022, ALL foreign tourist entering Belize will be required to purchase Travel Health Insurance. For more detailed information on COVID protocols visit : <https://belizetourismboard.org/news-and-gallery/belize-covid-19-travel-updates/#!>

Transportation

Flights are not included in the internship cost, and Ecorana does not provide transport to/from the internship center as the center is on a main bus route and easily accessible by public transit. The T.R.E.E.S Research Center can be found at mile marker 27.5 of the Hummingbird Hwy in the Stann Creek District of Belize. We are centrally located and easily accessible from the highway so you can travel here easily on your own by public transit which is the most economical choice. However, we are easily accessible by car (4 x 4 not necessary) if you choose to rent a vehicle while in Belize. Guests travelling southbound from The Phillip Goldson International Airport via public transport should have a 1-hour bus ride from Belize City to Belmopan which costs \$2.50 USD. However, you will need to take a taxi from the airport to the bus terminal in Belize City (\$25 US for two people). The bus ride from Belmopan to our centre is about 45 minutes and costs \$1.50 USD. The car ride travelling southbound is approximately 1.5 hrs from Belize City and if you choose to hire a taxi all the way from the airport you will be charged between \$135 and \$150 USD.

If you are coming from the south (i.e., Dangriga) we are about 2 miles north of Middlesex. From the bus terminal take a bus that is northbound to Belmopan or Belize City. The ride takes around 45 minutes and should cost \$1.50 USD. If you are arriving from the Dangriga airport we suggest that you take a taxi to the bus terminal which is about 10 minutes away and should not cost more than \$5.00 USD. Again, most conductors know where we are located, but if not, we are 2 miles north of Middlesex.

Passports and Visas

To enter Belize you will need a passport valid for more than six months before its expiration date. It can take as many as 6 weeks to obtain a passport, so get ready in advance. Nationals of the United States, Canada, Mexico, European Union countries, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Venezuela and members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) don't need a visa to enter the country.

Tourists who aren't from the previously mentioned countries may be required to apply and pay for a tourist visa before coming to Belize and, in some cases, might have to acquire permission from Belize Immigration to enter the country. Visas can cost anywhere from USD\$100 to USD\$2,000 depending on your nationality.

Belize allows visitors a maximum of one month's stay in the country before they require an extension obtained through the Belize Ministry of Defense and Immigration. Longer stays can be granted on a monthly basis for \$100 US per month, up to 6 months.

All visitors to Belize get a 30-day visitor Visa. This Visitor Visa is technically not available for "volunteers" and volunteers are supposed to apply for a special Volunteer Visa however this application and processing is an onerous process. So, we ask that you do not tell Customs/Immigrations that you are "volunteering" but rather are just visiting the country as a tourist or else doing an internship with us. A Visa extension for interns/volunteers deciding to stay for more than 30-days can be purchased at Immigrations in any of the major towns for \$100 USD/30 days.

Travel Insurance

Interns/volunteers are required to show proof of their own emergency travel medical insurance prior to or upon arrival at the center. AS PER NEW COVID ENTRY REQUIREMENTS, TRAVEL INSURANCE IS A REQUIREMENT FOR ENTRY INTO BELIZE.

What are the food arrangements?

Meals are included in the cost for interns and will be mostly prepared by T.R.E.E.S cooks from our kitchen (Monday through Friday only) though interns/volunteers will also likely have to do some self-catering from the communal kitchen which can be done in a communal manner or individually. All groceries are provided and we stock basic groceries (produce, meat, oils, spices, etc.) including gluten-free and dairy-free food items. Many of our supplies are grown locally on our farm (including chicken meat and eggs). All dietary restrictions and allergies (including coeliac disease) can be accommodated by our cook for meals being prepared from our kitchen.

What is the length of the internship/volunteership period?

The suggested length of an internship is 4 weeks to really get a feel for the project and grasp the skills and make the most of the training opportunities; it can be shorter or longer if desired. The minimum period for an internship is 2 weeks, and the minimum period for volunteer work is 2 weeks. For anyone choosing to stay longer than 4-weeks, a Visa extension is required (\$100 USD for 30 days).

What is the environment like at T.R.E.E.S?

The dominant ecosystem present at our site is Lowland Broadleaf Forest. Dominant plant species associated with this habitat and geology include Cohune Palm, Tree Ferns, a multitude of bromeliads and other epiphytes, many lianas and vines especially philodendrons, and a variety of hardwood tree species such as Ironwood, Mahogany, and Sapodilla. Habitat types represented include a combination of primary and secondary growth moist broadleaf forest, moist broadleaf riparian forest, an organic fruit orchard, an old overgrown orchard and pasture, and mixed forested edge and open edge habitat immediately surrounding the center. Dry Creek, a small river, meanders for about 1 km through the length of the property and is fed by an assortment of mountain tributaries scattered throughout the site, providing ample freshwater habitat for aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Over 10 km of trails run through the property and connect on the neighbouring property and into the Forest Reserve.

Where do I sleep?

Interns and volunteers sleep in same-sex bunkhouses. Our two Jungle Bunkhouses can sleep up to 10 and 12 people in bunk-beds with comfortable mattresses. Hot water showers and flush toilets are located in separate detached buildings. Interns and volunteers have access to all shared communal facilities including dining hall and lecture hall, lounge, office, yoga platform.

Is there any form of scholarship available through T.R.E.E.S. or Ecorana to subsidize the costs of the internship?

Unfortunately, our companies do not have funding to provide subsidies. We do consider reducing fees for Latin American students as well as students from other areas that we feel are truly skilled with a lot of experience in the internship topic that would be able to take a leadership role, though we may not be able to reduce the fees completely as we need to at least cover our costs of having interns stay and learn. Depending on the project we bring in local experts to teach which we have to pay for, and we also have to hire employees to work with interns on various projects.

We encourage students to look into grants/scholarships from other sources; there are a lot out there that are not tapped into. For American students, here are some possible sources:

http://www.volunteerforever.com/article_post/200-volunteer-abroad-study-abroad-scholarships-grants
<http://www.gooverseas.com/scholarships-volunteering-abroad>
<http://www.gooverseas.com/blog/65-study-abroad-grants-and-scholarships>
<http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/959.htm>

We may consider reducing fees dramatically (to as little as \$70 US/week including food) for volunteers that are mature, skilled, and would like to help in the areas of educational programming and teaching, supervising a particular internship or coordinating an internship period, marketing, organic gardening and tending to livestock, guest hospitality, accounting, and/or reservations. Waived fees only apply to volunteers wishing to stay a minimum of six weeks. Volunteers applying to supervise an internship topic should expect that they will not get the same training opportunities as the interns as they will essentially be the trainers for that particular internship.

What is the work schedule like?

The schedule largely depends on the project. If you are working more or less independently on a project or on volunteer work, you have a large amount of control over your own schedule. It is expected that a minimum of 6-8 hours per day, five days per week (Monday to Friday), are spent on project time. There are many side projects that may be carried out on the premises if desired. Projects with more participants will be more tightly scheduled, but will follow this general pattern. For now, all projects carried out at the station (including the trail building projects) will be within a 2 mile radius of the station's main facilities and thus interns will be able to return for meals and to the facilities and will not be expected to pack a lunch or stay off-site at any time. Normally weekends are free, but occasionally projects will need to be conducted over the weekend. In this case the intern/volunteer will have days off during the week instead.

Are the internships open to non-students or only to students?

The internships are open for applications from whoever is interested!

What about the Internet?

Interns/volunteers have a 100 MB per day limit for Wifi usage, and this is only in the main hall. If additional data is required for personal use, or the intern/volunteer wants to be able to use the internet at their cabins or elsewhere on the property, we recommend that interns/volunteers purchase their own SIM cards for use in their (unlocked) phones. Data plans can also be purchased. These services are available from the T.R.E.E.S office though advance notice must be provided. Additional internet usage required for T.R.E.E.S internship-related work will be provided from the office at no extra charge.

What other things should I prepare myself for?

The T.R.E.E.S Research Center is a field station in the jungle. Although we are off a main highway and accessible easily by road, we are still nonetheless located in the jungle in a remote, rural area of a developing country. As such, interns should prepare themselves to experience cultural differences and accept that they may not have all of the products available that they may be used to (nor the internet speed that they have come to expect in the developed world!).

Interns must also be able to adapt to the presence of fauna that many find intimidating and disturbing, including venomous snakes (though they are rarely seen) and a plethora of scorpions, spiders, biting flies, and other creepy-crawlies that some people might not be accustomed to (though very few are harmful).

Other travel considerations

Vaccines and prophylactics

Interns should make sure they have received required vaccinations prior to coming to Belize. We recommend the use of a travel clinic in preparing for travel to any foreign destination. These clinics will check the current recommendations for your destination country and then provide the appropriate vaccines and medications for such things as malaria prophylaxis. Although the incidence of malaria is very low in Belize, a prophylactic drug could be taken, this is a personal decision and that of your travel clinic doctor. As travelling anywhere in the world, Hepatitis A and B shots are recommended as well as up to date Tetanus, and Typhoid may be recommended if you will be in country for more than two weeks and traveling to remote villages. There is a low risk of dengue in the country, but it is present. Unfortunately, there are no vaccines to be taken for dengue.

Language

English is the official language of Belize and is spoken throughout the country, although only 4 % of the population speak it as their first language. English is the primary language of public education, with Spanish taught in primary and secondary school as well. Bilingualism is very common. Literacy currently stands at nearly 80%.

All courses at T.R.E.E.S will be taught in English though French and Spanish are also spoken by the staff.

The Belizean Kriol, an English-based Kriol is spoken throughout the country as well as Spanish. Then there many other languages regularly spoken in specific areas of Belize., the breakdown of spoken languages is as follows: Spanish 46%, Creole 32.9%, Mayan dialects, 8.9%, English 3.9% (official language), Garifuna 3.4% (Carib), German (Germanic Plautdietsch, spoken by the Mennonites) 3.3%, other 1.4%.

Money

The Belize Dollar is the official currency of Belize. For several decades now the Belize Dollar has been tied to the U.S. dollar at an official rate of two Belize Dollars to one US dollar, thus, one U.S. dollar equals two Belize dollars. While not recommended as a day to day practice most establishments will accept American money, this even includes the little food stores, as long as the bills are not too big.

There is a bank machine in the Airport that will hand out Belize dollars as well as a Money Exchange office. There are also bank machines in the larger cities (Belmopan, Dangriga, Placencia, etc.). We recommend

travelling with some cash but there is no need to travel with large amounts as you can withdraw money from bank machines using foreign cards in all major towns.

Most larger stores, particularly tourist shops, will nearly always accept credit cards.

What should I bring to the Station?

Pack light but bring everything you may need. Goods purchased in Belize (such as batteries and film) may be much more expensive and of inferior quality to those you are accustomed to purchasing. We supply bedding (sheets, pillows, and blankets) and towels at T.R.E.E.S (though towels are supplied for short-term guests, longer-term interns and volunteers should bring their own towels). We do not supply bath products (soap, shampoo, conditioner). Many field stations and some other types of rustic accommodations in Belize do not supply bedding. Make sure you check with all of your accommodation providers to ensure you are bringing everything you may need. Cabins at T.R.E.E.S have screens as will most other accommodations. However, some people feel more comfortable sleeping under a mosquito net and we recommend bringing a bed net to anyone that wishes. There are hooks above all of the beds for hanging these nets.

Remember, you will be limited to one checked bag on most American airlines and two carry-on bags. We recommend packing light clothes. In most seasons (wet and dry) we recommend gear and clothes that dry quickly, either the wetness of the rainy season or the humidity of the jungle even during the dry season causes things to go moldy rapidly. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are great at keeping the biting flies away and we usually recommend wearing pants at all times at T.R.E.E.S.

Flash rains do occur during the wet season up in the mountains, so we highly suggest that you bring some boots to work in the jungle as well as some rain gear, at least a fast-drying rain jacket.

- Rain gear
- Insect Repellent (bug spray)
- Sturdy hiking shoes/boots
- Rain (rubber) boots and/or Tevas or other hiking sandals that can be used in the water
- Sandals and summer clothes
- Bathing Suit
- Towel
- Long pants (preferably light, quick-dry material)
- One warm shirt
- At least one quick-drying long sleeved shirt
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- A good book, during those off times
- Headlamp/flashlight
- Binoculars and/or Camera
- A Rite-in-the-Rain book with waterproof paper to use as a field journal
- USB thumb drive
- Sturdy, thick and well-fitted gloves (if you are working with bats)

Health and Safety

Measure in place at T.R.E.E.S

To ensure your quick recovery in the rare case of a serious emergency we ask that all visitors to our centre present proof of adequate travel medical insurance, specifically with emergency air evacuation coverage. Though hospitals in Belize are very adequate for dealing with routine injuries (including snake bite), major emergencies are better handled outside of Belize.

Your health and safety are very important to us at T.R.E.E.S and as such we have the following measures in place:

- We have a first aid station that is always fully stocked and all field staff and managers have up-to-date first aid certification.
- Field staff and managers are also equipped with first aid kits when in the field with guests.
- The station is equipped with an Epi-Pen.
- All of the cabins and communal facilities are equipped with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
- We have an up-to-date emergency preparedness plan as well as evacuation plans if need be.

We also recommend that all guests bring their own first aid kits, sunscreen, and sunburn relief cream, allergy medication, bug repellent, and AfterBite to make their stay at T.R.E.E.S as enjoyable as possible!

Other precautions for travel within Belize

There are some thefts in Belize; while most incidents are in Belize City and crime is not directly targeted at tourists we recommend that you take the usual precautions.

The first tip is to not look flashy, don't flaunt nice watches, purses, etc. Always carry your money and passport on your person when travelling. Although we have never had any incidences of thieving at T.R.E.E.S., these people are still around, and you can keep your passport and money in our safe when you arrive at the station, if you so desire.

Make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport and keep this in a separate place from your actual passport. This can aid in getting a new passport should you lose yours.

Bring your driver's licence but leave your school ID and unnecessary credit cards at home. If it is difficult to replace, if you don't need it, or if you can't afford to lose it, leave it at home. The only necessary documentation in Belize is your passport and driver's license if you decide to rent a car or drive for any reason.

If you take medication for any reason, be sure you have an adequate supply.

We suggest that you bring plenty of insect repellent with DEET (25%), although it can be found quite easily in the country (but more expensive than home). One must remember that DEET eats plastic and 100 % DEET is not recommended for direct contact with skin. Citronella insect repellents seem to work quite well for the Botlax flies which are the most common biting insects at T.R.E.E.S.

How do I pay for my stay?

We have several methods of payment available for clients paying from outside of Belize and within Belize:

- Wire transfer from your financial institution to our Canadian bank account
- PayPal account (sent to registration@ecorana.ca) or Credit Card Payment – these payment options incur a 4% processing fee
- Personal cheque or money order sent by registered mail to our banker in Vancouver, B.C., to be deposited in our Canadian account
- Canadian clients can also pay by direct deposit into our TD Canada Trust bank account or by Interac e-transfer (sent to registration@ecorana.ca) if you have online banking with almost any Canadian bank.
- Clients within Belize can pay us by cheque or by direct deposit into our Belize Scotiabank account or in cash on site (Belize Dollars or U.S. Dollars accepted).

Detailed banking information will be sent along with your invoice depending on your location and desired mode of payment.