



Rotary Service Trip
April 20-26, 2025
October 12-18, 2025

Trip Overview & Summary

Give & Surf has designed the week-long itinerary below with the intention of providing Rotarians with a culturally immersive experience during which they volunteer in our B.E.S.T. (Bocas Education of Service & Tourism) vocational programs, participate in various community visits & local tours/excursions, and have the opportunity to engage with members of the Bocas del Toro Rotary Club. Our goal is to give the participants a meaningful volunteer experience that has a positive, lasting impact in the communities we serve.

Volunteers will assist our local teacher during weekday mornings with the vocational training programs by assisting with English classes and conversation exchanges as well as being practice clients. The afternoons include a mix of free time and various excursions as listed below. The group will be staying at a locally owned hotel in Bocas town and will eat breakfast on-site. Most lunches will be eaten at the local community restaurants and consist of chicken, rice & beans, and fresh fruit. Two group dinners are included and will be at restaurants in Bocas Town.

All ages are invited to join the trip! Activities & tours can be modified based on the interests of the group as well as each individual's abilities. Children are welcome to come as well but must be accompanied by a parent or chaperone.

We are happy to make recommendations of where to go, eat, & stay in Panama City if individuals would like to add time before or after their trip. We can also directly book Panama City transportation, hotels, etc. and/or domestic flights from Panama City to Bocas for an additional fee.

When living in remote island communities, we often face unpredictable situations and conditions, such as rainy weather conditions, power outages, and other challenges, that may result in changes to the itinerary below. We will do our best to adapt schedules to ensure that participants get to experience everything we have planned.

Sample Itinerary

Day 1: Sunday

- Afternoon arrival in Bocas
- Welcome, itinerary overview & group dinner

Day 2: Monday

- Morning: Volunteer with BEST
- Lunch at Chikita Beach with BEST participants
- Afternoon: Snorkel & boat trip

Day 3: Tuesday

- Morning: Volunteer with BEST
- Lunch at JJs
- Afternoon: Free time (optional excursions: Surfing, Red Frog Beach, SCUBA) or Volunteer at Bocas or Bastimentos after-school program
- Happy Hour with local Bocas del Toro Rotarians & local NGO leaders

Day 4: Wednesday

- Morning: Volunteer with BEST
- Afternoon: Lunch in Cristobal, tour of indigenous community, and Chocolate Farm tour
- Group Dinner

Day 5: Thursday

- Morning: Volunteer with BEST
- Visit to Bahía Roja community
- Lunch & Afternoon at Red Frog Beach

Day 6: Friday

- Morning: Volunteer with BEST
- Lunch at Chikita Beach with BEST participants
- Afternoon: Free time (optional excursions: Surfing, Red Frog Beach, SCUBA) or Volunteer at Bocas or Bastimentos after-school program

Day 7: Saturday

- Morning flight back to Panama City

Price: \$945 per person* (*Shared room; additional fee of \$200 can be paid for private room)

Includes:

- 6 nights accommodation in Bocas del Toro
- Breakfast & lunch daily; water or soda with each meal (mix of community meals and local restaurants), plus 2 group dinners
- In-country Give & Surf staff person and local guides upon arrival in Bocas del Toro
- Local transportation in Bocas del Toro (water taxis, taxis)
- Airport pick up/drop off in Bocas del Toro
- Excursions as listed above.

Does not include:

- International or domestic airfare or transportation to/from Bocas del Toro
- Travel medical/emergency insurance (Give & Surf does carry a general liability insurance policy)
- Meals, snacks, drinks outside of listed meal times. No alcoholic beverages are included.



Frequently Asked Questions

Give & Surf wants to help make your logistics and trip planning as seamless as possible. We are happy to help you book flights with Air Panama, arrange airport transfers in Panama City, coordinate hotels & tours in Panama City, and assist with any other details. Please feel free to contact us with any questions at emily@giveandsurf.org or info@giveandsurf.org.

Travel

How to get to Bocas del Toro?

- You can book your international flight to Panama City, Panama or San Jose, Costa Rica. We recommend flying into Panama City, as the only option from San Jose is a 10-hour shuttle.
- **From Panama City:**
 - Recommended: Domestic Flight from Panama City: Fly with Air Panama or Fly Trip on a short 1-hour direct flight to Bocas del Toro (BOC). Tickets can be purchased at www.airpanama.com or <https://flytrip.com.pa/>. The cost is approximately \$200-250 roundtrip. Flights leave from Albrook domestic airport (PAC), which is a 30 minute, \$25-30 cab or Uber ride from the international airport or a 10 minute, \$10-15 cab or Uber ride from most hotels/hostels within the city. Leave at least 3-4 hours between your international and domestic flight arrival and departure times so you have time to clear customs and transfer between airports.
 - Bus: Direct buses (10-12 hours overnight) to Almirante (port town near Bocas town) leave at daily in the evening around 8pm from Albrook Mall Terminal in Panama City. Make sure to wear pants and bring a jacket, as the bus gets cold. From Almirante, you will get off the bus and take a \$1 cab ride to Bocas Marine Tours. From here you take a \$6 water taxi to Bocas Town. Boats leave every 30 minutes starting at 6 AM. The cost is approximately \$50-60 round trip.
- **From Costa Rica:**
 - Bus: The easiest way to travel by bus is with Caribe Shuttle (approx 10 hours). There is also a public bus that leaves from the Coca Cola Bus Station in San Jose at 9 AM. Purchase the ticket when you get on the bus. You will arrive to the border around 2 PM. At the border you will need to get out and walk across the border to get your passport stamped. The bus will continue to the Almirante bus station. From here take a \$1 taxi ride to Bocas Marine Tours and get a water taxi to Bocas Town. The last water taxi leaves at 6 PM.

Where do we get picked up?

- All groups will be picked up in Bocas Town upon arrival at the airport. If arriving before or after the group, it is easy to take a taxi from the airport to the hotel (\$2 per person)

Do I need a visa? Any other entry requirements?

- U.S. & Canadian citizens do not need a visa. You will automatically be given a “tourist visa” when you go through immigration. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months past your trip dates and you must show your exit ticket (flight ticket to leave Panama; a bus ticket is not sufficient). U.S. & Canadian citizens can stay in Panama for 180 days. For visa and entry requirements for other countries, please check with your country’s embassy or consulate.

Payment & Cancellation Policies

When are payments due?

- A nonrefundable deposit of \$300 per person is due at the time you are registering. Registration is on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- The remaining balance is due 30 days before the trip date.

What is a participant cancels?

- The \$300 deposit is nonrefundable. The entire amount is not refundable if a participant cancels within 30 days of the departure date. In emergency circumstances, a full or partial refund or credit may be issued less direct expenses already incurred by Give and Surf.
- We recommend taking out travel insurance to cover any trip interruptions, delays or cancellations that may be caused by personal or global circumstances.

Health & Safety

Is it safe?

- Yes, Panama City and Bocas del Toro are both safe areas to visit in Panama and Central America. However, we are in a developing country and you should be aware of your surroundings, stay in the tourist areas of town and Panama City, and travel with a buddy or group. The most frequent crimes are petty thefts and robberies so don’t carry a lot of cash or flash valuables around especially after dark.
- All volunteers will go through an orientation with a Give & Surf staff member upon their arrival in Bocas which will include important information about health & safety.

Do I need medical insurance?

- We strongly recommend all volunteers have medical insurance coverage. We suggest all volunteers check their international coverage with their medical insurance providers and/or buy travel medical insurance.
- Recommended travel/medical insurance: World Nomad, Seven Corners

What vaccinations do I need?

- Please visit your primary health care physician to discuss your upcoming trip to Panama and to get all of the necessary shots and medication required for your trip. You will want to have a prescription from your doctor outlining all prescriptions and their purpose. You can also visit the CDC's website for a list of recommendations of vaccinations by country.

Can I drink the water?

- Yes and no. We don't recommend drinking the tap water in town or in the communities we work as your body may not be accustomed to the bacteria in the local water. You can use the water to brush your teeth, shower, etc. in most hotels/hostels. Most restaurants serve filtered water if you ask for a glass of water. Give & Surf will provide a large tank of filtered water at the program site and, if needed, at the lodging site.
- Please bring a reusable water bottle.

Is there a hospital/medical care?

- Yes, there is a public hospital with an emergency room that is open 24/7 in Bocas Town as well as a private health clinic. The services provided are limited so if it is a serious injury or illness, a person would need to be transported to David or Panama City where there are bigger & better hospitals.

Panama City Questions

Give & Surf has add-on packages available to handle all of your Panama City needs including airport transfers, accommodations, meals, transportation, and tours. Please let us know if you are interested in a Panama City extension package. We are also happy to make recommendations for hotels, tours, etc.

Where to stay in Panama City?

- There are a wide range of hotels/hostels/B&Bs in Panama City. We recommend using Hotels.com and staying in downtown Panama City (near Via Espana or Via Argentina) which is convenient for tours and airport transfers or in Casco Viejo (the historic part of town) or near either the Tocumen international or Albrook domestic airports
 - Tocumen Airport: Crowne Plaza or Riande Aeropuerto
 - Albrook Airport: Marriott Panama (Ancon)
 - Casco Viejo: Tantaló Hotel, American Trade Hotel
 - Downtown: Courtyard by Marriott (Multiplaza Mall), TRYP by Wyndham (Downtown), Decapolis Hotel Panama, Ramada Plaza by Wyndham (Punta Pacifica), Sortis Hotel

What should I do in Panama City?

- If visiting Panama City there are a number of amazing sights to see and our short list includes the Panama Canal, Casco Viejo, Miraflores Locks, The Fish Market & Amador Causeway

How do I get from the international airport to the domestic airport?

- After leaving customs at Tocumen International Airport in Panama City, you will find authorized taxi drivers waiting outside. There are mini-shuttles available and the group rate should be \$15-20 per person to get to either a hotel downtown or to the Albrook domestic airport. Individual rate is \$25-30 per person.
- Give & Surf can arrange group transportation if desired.

Bocas Logistics

Where do I stay?

- Group trips will be housed at one of the locally owned hostels or hotels that we partner with. The exact location will be determined by the group size, activities planned, budget, and itinerary. Please see your personalized itinerary for details about your accommodations.

What do we eat?

- Please see your personalized itinerary for details about what meals are included. Breakfasts are served on site at your place of lodging. Lunches are usually “comida tipica” (rice, beans, chicken, plantains) prepared in the local communities. The two group dinners are at restaurants in Bocas Town and include a variety of options.

What if I have food allergies or restrictions?

- You can purchase your own food if needed at a specialty grocery store in Bocas Town, Super Gourmet, that does have some gluten-free products and other select items although the selection is much more limited than you may be used to.
- During the week, the lunches in the community are usually chicken or fish served with rice & beans and plantains. They are able to make this vegetarian or vegan by simply leaving off the chicken or fish, but if you have other allergies/restrictions, we recommend that you pack your own lunch for these days.
- Restaurants in the main town have a wide variety of food options are usually able to accommodate any food restrictions or allergies.

Is there internet?

- At most hotels & hostels and many restaurants, there is WiFi.
- As we want all participants to be immersed in the local culture and appreciate their surroundings, we suggest limiting the times when cell phones and the internet may be used.

Do I need a cell phone?

- No, you do not unless you would like to stay in touch with people by phone. Give & Surf will provide the group trip leader with a phone to use throughout the trip.
- If you would like your own phone you can: 1. Activate a global plan on your smart phone if available through your service provider, 2. Buy a Panama SIM card for your unlocked smart phone and buy a data/cell plan (\$20); or 3. Use the free app Airalo to download data from a Panamanian service provider (\$5-10).

Is there a bank?

- Yes. There is one bank and several ATMs in Bocas, where you can withdraw a maximum of \$250/day. Please make sure your bank knows you are traveling out of the country otherwise they will cancel your card.
- American dollars (sometimes referred to as Balboas) are used as the currency in Panama.

Are credit cards accepted?

- Credit cards are accepted at most hotels and restaurants in Panama City and Bocas Town. Some smaller restaurants and tours will be cash only. Water taxis and taxis and cash only.

How much extra spending money will I need?

- Most meals & activities are included so not much extra spending money is needed. \$250-300 per person to cover dinners that are not included, souvenirs, snacks, and the optional excursions/free time.
- Average meal prices: Local meal \$5-8, Dinner at a nice restaurant in town \$15-20
- Excursion prices: SCUBA \$80-100 per dive, ATVing \$100, SUP or Kayak rental \$10-20

Are laundry services available?

- Some hotels have laundry services available. There are a number of places in town that clean clothes for \$5-6 a load.

Bugs?

- Bugs and critters are part of life in Bocas. Mosquitos and chitra (aka no-see-ums) are prevalent at dawn and dusk. We recommend bringing bug repellent.

Can I bring supplies or gifts for the children?

- Yes! We can send you a list of needed classroom materials and supplies for our programs. Please do not hand these out directly to children though as we do not want them to expect to receive gifts every time there are volunteers/visitors. Your donated supplies can be given to the Give & Surf teachers to be used/distributed appropriately.

What should I pack?

- Light-weight, fast-drying clothes as you are frequently around the water and we get pop-up showers. Attire is informal here: shorts, t-shirts, sundresses, bathing suits
- Old sneakers or water shoes you don't mind getting wet/muddy
- Sunscreen and bug spray. You can purchase here but they tend to be more expensive.
- Any regular medications you take. There are pharmacies here but they don't always carry the same brands.
- Raincoat, reusable water bottle, day backpack or dry bag