

Extensive information:

Project Sea Turtles
Athens Greece



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Note: Annually the text of this extensive information will be developed and will be kept up with regularly in cooperation with the local project staff. Because there can be made some changes or because there will be some changes be necessary because of certain and unexpected results, it could it be that this text not every time will compare in practise at this project.

Join the project with an open mind, and a flexible attitude and you will leave Athens with unique, special and unforgettable memories!



1. Sea turtle introduction

Sea turtles are reptiles that have totally adapted to sea life. Like all reptiles, they have lungs and need to surface occasionally to breathe, their skin is covered in scales and they lay eggs. Although they spend most of their lives at sea, they are dependent on land for reproduction. Unfortunately, all seven species of sea turtles are threatened by extinction due to the degradation of their nesting habitats, pollution and human interaction (such as fisheries).

1.1 Anatomy

The Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) is one of three species of sea turtles that can be found in the Mediterranean Sea and the only one that nests in Greece. The loggerhead is one of the most widespread of all the marine turtles. Its common name comes from its relatively large head, which contains powerful jaws. The carapace (top shell) and flippers of the adult turtle are reddish-brown in color, whilst the underneath (or plastron) is more yellow in appearance. Adults can reach a length of 80-100 cm and weigh about 80 kg.

1.2 Reproductive behaviour

Loggerhead turtles are pelagic animals. This means that they travel in the open sea but approach the coast when they are ready to reproduce.

They reach sexual maturity when they are 20-30 years old. The eggs have the same shape and size as a ping-pong ball and are laid in a dry part of a sandy beach. The eggs are placed in an egg chamber, which is usually dug in an undisturbed area and is about 50-60 cm deep. The female comes ashore and climbs up towards the back of the beach. She then makes a shallow hole in the sand called a body pit. Then she digs the egg chamber using her hind flippers, lays the eggs inside, and covers the nest with sand. There are usually 120 eggs per clutch, and each female lays approximately two clutches every 15 days. The females only come ashore to nest at night from the end of May until the end of August. The females usually nest every 2-3 years with 3-4 nests per season.

The nests must remain undisturbed in the warm sand for about 60 days before the eggs hatch. The hatchlings remain in the nest for several days before emerging to cross the beach and enter the sea.

Hatchlings can be seen emerging from their nests from late July until the end of October. They dig their way out of the nest in a joint effort and usually emerge during the night. They then make their way down to the sea by heading for the brightest source of light - in undisturbed beaches this is usually the reflection of the stars and moon in the ocean. This race from their nests to the sea is crucial for the turtles' survival. Although a female sea turtle may lay hundreds of eggs each summer, it is estimated that only a few hatchlings out of a thousand will survive to adulthood.



1.3 Diet

Loggerheads turtles are carnivorous and feed mainly on jellyfish, crustaceans such as sea urchins, and other slow-moving organisms. They have very powerful jaws which enable them to easily crush the hard shells of their prey.

1.4 Endangered species

Sea turtles have been swimming in our oceans and seas for over 150 million years. Contemporaries of the earliest dinosaurs, they appeared long before mankind. After having survived climatic and geological changes, sea turtles today face extinction due to uncontrolled human exploitation. Although sea turtles spend the majority of their time at sea, their survival still depends on the condition of specific beaches. Amazingly, females will return to the beach where they were born to lay their eggs. Sadly, most of the beaches that sea turtles use for nesting have been destroyed or are under intense human pressure.

Greece is home to the last significant concentration of Loggerhead nesting sites in the Mediterranean with the most important area being in Laganas Bay on the island of Zakynthos. Here, on 5 kilometres of beaches, an average of 1300 nests is dug per year.

Threats to sea turtles today include the destruction of their nesting habitats, their accidental capture in fishing gear, the illegal wildlife trade and pollution.



2. The project

This project is a non-profit organisation founded in 1983 with the aim to protect sea turtles and their habitats in Greece. They work to raise public awareness about the dangers turtles face and lobby for the implementation of measures needed for their protection. For over 20 years, the organisation has been running conservation projects in Greece's main Loggerhead nesting sites. They've also started an environmental education programme directed towards Greek students and a Rescue Centre for the treatment and rehabilitation of injured turtles. More than 500 volunteers from all over the world participate in the organisation's projects on Zakynthos, Crete, Peloponnesus and in Athens.

2.1 Rescue Center Athens

Many sea turtles are annually reported stranded throughout Greece, usually caught in fishing gear or injured by speedboats and fishermen. The ones that are still alive have a good chance to survive if immediate and proper treatment is provided. As a consequence, the project established in 1994 its Sea Turtle Rescue Centre in Athens with the following objectives:

- To treat and rehabilitate injured, sick or weak sea turtles
- To raise public awareness, especially amongst schoolchildren and fishermen
- To operate a Sea Turtle Rescue Network throughout Greece

For these purposes, five old train wagons have been converted into facilities, which include rehabilitation, exhibition, and accommodation areas. These facilities have expanded to include two containers and several outdoor tanks for the sea turtles.



2.2 Sea turtle stranding network

For thousands of years fishermen, fish and sea turtles lived in a balanced environment. During the last decades this situation has dramatically changed. The causes of this situation are mainly the following:

- Deterioration and destruction of coasts (usually by tourist activities, coast road constructions etc)
- Degradation of sea ecosystems and particularly the most productive ones found in the coastal zone (usually by industrial wastes and agricultural discharges through rivers to the sea).
- The intensification of fishing.
- The use of non-selective and destructive fishing gear.

There are already areas on the planet where thousands of fishermen are unemployed due to exhaustion of all fish supplies in their area. This situation must stop at once if we want to save the future for fishermen, fish, sea turtles and sea life.

Today fishermen must use highly modern and strong fishing gear and cover much bigger distance for a small fishing yield. Fishermen and turtles "compete" for a few fish, in a constantly diminished sea.

Each year about 300 dead or injured turtles are reported to ARCHELON through the National Rescue Network. Most of them have been injured by fishermen who found them in their nets or long lines. But extinction of sea turtles will mean greater destruction of sea life and fishing.

On the basis of more recent data, coastal fishing seems to be the main cause of death of turtles in the sea. Thinking that there are tens of thousands of professional coastal fishermen in Greece, we need immediately their help to save this unique species.

The project, having the target to coordinate organized efforts for saving the sea turtles, established the National Rescue Network for sea turtles.

The Rescue Network consists of local coast guards, fishermen, members and volunteers of the project local or national environmental organizations and citizens. When a dead or injured sea turtle is found, the members of the Network make sure that the local coast guard knows about it. In case of dead turtle, the coast guard makes sure that it will be buried by the Municipality or the Community of the area and all the required data is safely kept. In case of injured sea turtle, the coast guard makes sure that it will be transported to the Rescue Centre.

The bigger the number of the members of the National Rescue Network, the most efficient will it work and save more sea turtles.

Participation of fishermen is crucial for this effort to succeed. Fishermen can locate injured sea turtles in the sea before they are washed ashore and thus valuable time is saved for the treatment of the animal.

2.3 Rehabilitation

The Rescue Centre coordinates the network and collects stranding data which is analyzed with the aid of Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

At the same time the project operates two First Aid Stations in Crete (Pagalohori of Rethymno) and in West Greece (Amvrakikos) which can accommodate turtles for short period of time. These Stations are equipped with exhibition areas for the visitors and especially for children. Every year almost 50 turtles are brought to the Rescue Centre from all over Greece. The most common injuries for which turtles are being treated at the centre are: amputations due to fishing gear entanglement, ingestion of hooks and other materials such as plastic bags, deliberate head injuries by fishermen, collision with speedboats etc.



2.5 Education / Public awareness

Every year almost 20000 people (schools, organized groups, and individual visitors) visit the exhibition area of the Rescue Centre. Environmental activities are conducted in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Education.

The Volunteers Training Centre, which was made in co-operation with the General Youth Secretariat, is an area special organized for presentations and accommodates a photographic exhibition about the history, biodiversity and biology of sea turtle.

The Rescue Centre coordinates the European Community Program LIFE Nature with the main objective of reducing turtle mortality related to fishing activities.



3. Volunteers

3.1 Research opportunities

Research opportunities are available for students interested in conducting undergraduate or postgraduate research during their stay as a volunteer. Research applications must be completed well in advance in order to receive the necessary information and complete a research agreement form. If you are interested please indicate this in the section of the booking sheet that reads 'possible or additional general remarks'.

3.2 Period / duration

Volunteers are welcome on the rescue centre in Athens all year round.
You are free to choose your own arrival date.
Your stay must be 28 days or longer, but the recommended duration is 6 weeks.
Long-term participation is highly appreciated.

3.3 Requirements

- Minimum age of 18 years.
- Volunteers must be able to communicate in English.
- It's not required, but basic knowledge of animal care is highly appreciated
- Vaccinations (see medical advice section).

3.4 Fees

Participation fees are specified on the Global Spirit website.

These fees include:

- Accommodation (volunteers have to bring their own sleeping bag)
- Training and supervision
- Volunteer T-shirt and Turtle biology booklet (received upon arrival)
- Administrative costs

These fees do not include:

- Flight/travel to and from Athens, Greece
- Transport to and from the volunteer accommodation to the project site
- Passport or ID-card
- Visa (when necessary)
- Travel insurance (compulsory for all participants) and cancellation insurance
- All meals
- Personal expenses such as telephone bills, internet, souvenirs, etc.
- Any excursions undertaken by the volunteer

3.5 Accommodation

The project accommodation is in an apartment in Athens about 8 km from the project site.

The Apartment can accommodate maximum 8 volunteers at the same time.

There are two bedrooms and normally the volunteers are not divided in the rooms regarding their gender. There is also a Kitchen, a bathroom, a living room/dining area and a big balcony. Heating and Wi-Fi are also available.



Some days of the week, few volunteers have to stay at the Rescue Center at the project site. This accommodation is quite basic.

Bedrooms: All volunteers are staying in special arranged areas at the project site. Normally the volunteers are not divided in the rooms regarding their gender. The volunteers have one train wagon (with a small bedroom with 4 beds, kitchen, toilet and shower) and one container with two bedrooms, one lounge room and a small laundry room. project can accommodate maximum 8 volunteers at the same time.

Bathroom: The shower/toilet is quite a small room. There is also a WC outside of the train wagon which is for the public. This should be used by the volunteers **only** when public hours are over.

Heating/Warming: During winter it can get quite cold. For the winter the project uses gas stoves. During summer it can get very hot. There are some fans for the heat and limited areas with air conditioning.

Privacy: Generally during winter due to the fact that its cold there are limited private areas, but during the summer there is a common area that the volunteers use.

The Rescue Center facilities are like living in a camping, so it has much contact with the nature. Mosquitoes, cockroaches, bees and other insects cannot be avoided. **Cleaning is the best tool to keep them away.**

Cleaning is also compulsory for all the accommodation area in a regular basis. It is also compulsory **to clean your accommodation area upon arrival and before you go.**

Volunteers must have a **positive attitude** towards working and living in a group and will have to accept the responsibilities that group living entails. Volunteers are also responsible for housekeeping duties.



3.6 The work

Interested volunteers must be prepared to do physically demanding work for long hours. Please note that basic knowledge of animal care is highly appreciated.

Know that the sea turtles are quite heavy (can get 80 to 90 kilos) and the tasks involve much turtle lifting.

The volunteer will be expected to participate in all aspects of work at the Rescue Centre. These are the Rescue Network, sea turtle rehabilitation, public awareness and maintenance. Duties will be allocated by the Project Leader, usually in accordance with a weekly schedule. More specifically:

- **Rescue Network:** activities include response to live sea turtle stranding throughout Greece, collection of injured sea turtles from the airport, train or bus station, or Piraeus port. Understandably these activities are not part of the daily routine, but take priority whenever they do occur. This is the reason that it would be very useful if the volunteer can drive the car of the project. The volunteers might be asked to drive the project's car for this purpose.
- **Sea turtle Rehabilitation:** duties include the preparation and administration of food (usually fish) to the turtles, daily treatment of the animals as determined by the vets (administering medication, cleaning wounds) as well as taking biometric data and making behavior observations. This is one of the main daily activities within the Rescue Centre, since at any given time there is an average of 20 to 25 turtles under treatment. Please note that this is highly physical demanding task.



- Public Awareness: activities include the running of the Rescue Centre’s exhibition area and providing information to visitors, conducting presentations to organized groups and assisting in public events organized by ARCHELON to promote the Rescue Centre (e.g. publicized sea turtle releases, participation in exhibitions, etc).



- Maintenance: activities include basic maintenance duties like painting of the wagons, operation of the water supply systems as well as cleaning the facilities and equipment.
- Data entry: Detailed information is kept on each sea turtle case admitted to the Rescue Centre. All data collected is entered in databases so that they can be subsequently used for the compilation of statistical reports. Volunteers may be asked to assist by carrying out data entry on the computer.

You will work 7 days a week (about 8 hours a day) and are entitled to 3 days off during a 28 day period.



3.7 The project staff

The project has a coordinator who is assisted by seasonal personnel (field leaders). Field leaders and other experienced members of the project are responsible for allocating duties as well as training and supervising volunteers.

The Official language of communication on the project site is English. Knowledge of other languages such as German can also prove to be very useful for public awareness purposes.

4. Athens, Greece

4.1 Geography

Greece is a mountainous peninsula located in Southern Europe, on the Mediterranean Sea, between Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The capital and its hinterland are located on a broad peninsula that juts out into the Aegean Sea. Athens itself is now home to c.4,000,000 people, and has filled a plain that is contained between three mountain ranges and the sea.

4.2 Project Location

The rescue centre is located in the south of the capital Athens close by a harbour.



4.3 Climate

Greece has a temperate climate. Dry, hot summer days are often relieved by seasonal breezes popularly called "meltemia". An outstanding feature of the Greek climate is its ample sunshine, estimated to be 3,000 hours per year. Winters are mild and the rainy season is between November and March.

Athens, where the Rescue Center is placed, is in a marina, surrounded by the sea, so it has much humidity.

The weather in winter can get quite cold with occasional rainstorms.

Summers are very hot and sunny during the day, with temperatures sometimes exceeding 40oC.

During the night it can get cooler and humid.

4.4 Culture

Greece has a diverse culture that has been influenced by its location at the junction between the East and the West and by the many occupations endured by the Greek people throughout history.

Greeks are particularly proud of their culture and celebrate it with great passion; their culture helps to define their national and ethnic identity.

5. Travel information

5.1 Flight arrangements

Volunteers are responsible for their own flight arrangements. We advise you not to reserve your flight before we have confirmed your participation in the project (unless you are planning to include your participation as a part of a longer journey).

However, if you are unable to arrange your flight for any reason, please let us know on the booking sheet and Global Spirit will do what it can to help.

5.2 Passport and visa

To visit Greece, EU citizens will need a valid passport (or ID-card). The passport must be valid for at least six months after the date of your arrival. If you are not an EU citizen, **please check whether a visa is necessary at the Greek embassy in your country.**

5.3 Insurances

Every volunteer is required to have a travel (medical) insurance policy and cancellation insurance is highly recommended. You will not be permitted to work at the sea turtle project without travel (medical) insurance. Global Spirit can help you to arrange travel (medical) and cancellation insurance. If you'd like our help, please indicate this on the booking sheet. If you already have insurance(s) (or you are a participant outside the Netherlands) please send a copy of the policy to Global Spirit.

5.4 Arrival in Athens, Greece

You will be responsible for arranging your own transport to Athens, Greece as well as to the project location. Specific directions describing how to get to your project location will be sent to you after your booking.



6. Medical advice

6.1 Advice

As Global Spirit is not a professional medical service, we advise you to go to a local clinic or medical authority in your own country for the appropriate medical advice.

This document is provided for informational purposes only

As a participant at this project you are responsible for your own actions. Global Spirit is not held responsible/liable for any unexpected casualties.

6.2 Required vaccinations

No vaccinations are required for working at this project.

6.3 Recommended vaccinations

You are recommended to be vaccinated against:

- DTP
- Hepatitis A

These vaccinations are not required, but are still very important to have.

6.4 Medical services in Greece

Good medical services are available in Athens.

If you should need medical attention, please contact a staff member of the project.

7. Personal equipment

7.1 Essential items

The following is a list of items that you should bring with you:

- Valid passport (or ID-card)
- Sleeping bag
- Pillow covers
- Working clothes
- Appropriate clothes and shoes for working with the public (e.g. presentations at hotels)
- Warm and comfortable clothes (May, June, September, October)
- Waterproof clothes and boots (especially for May and September/October)
- A raincoat or poncho (especially for May and September/October)
- Strong, good walking shoes
- A hat or cap
- Sunglasses
- Insect/mosquito repellent
- First-aid kit with plasters and disinfectant
- Towel(s)
- Toiletry articles
- Sunscreen (it's recommended to use for at least SPF 20)
- Drivers license or boat licence (if you have one)
- Alarm clock

7.2 Optional items

The following is a list of optional items you may choose to bring with you:

- Water bottle
- A watch
- A torch and spare batteries
- A Pocket knife
- Binoculars
- A lighter
- A notebook
- A compass
- A camera (and photographic materials)
- Snorkelling equipment
- Bathing/swimming suit
- Mosquito net
- Something against dehydration like ORS (we advise you to drink a lot of water)
- Imodium or other anti-diarrhoea medication
- Books
- Magazines
- Snacks
- Etc.

8. General information (Athens, Greece)

8.1 Food and refreshments

Greek cuisine is famous for its high-quality products and the amazing taste of its food and wines. Some dishes are prepared similarly everywhere in Greece, whereas others are local culinary specialties or may be cooked in different styles depending on the region (like the Peloponnesus, etc...).

Basic cooking facilities are available at the project.

Normally the volunteers eat together. They use a community based system for sharing the food cost.

This is around 20 to 30 Euros per week which suffice for basic food costs. (If you want to follow your own way about food and cooking of course that's also fine, but know that then you might need around 15 Euros per day in order to cover your own food expenses).



8.2 Supermarkets and markets

There are many supermarkets and markets available in Athens.

Once you arrive at your project, a staff member will show you where supplies can be purchased.

A main shopping area is five minutes away on foot.

8.3 Laundry services

There is no washing machine available at the project.

8.4 Telephone

Volunteers will have to make their own arrangements when contacting their family and friends at home. The office phones are only to be used for emergencies.

Mobile phones can be used and network coverage is generally good.

Please contact your home phone company for the most updated information.

8.5 Internet access

WIFI is available in the volunteer apartment. Although the project's office is equipped with internet connections, the office computers can only be used to receive urgent messages. However, there are also a lot of Internet cafes or other Internet facilities in Athens.

8.6 Electricity

Greece's electricity system has a voltage of 220 Volt (50 Hertz). Round two-pin plugs can be used. North Americans will require a transformer and British volunteers will need to bring an adaptor. These can be purchased in specialised shops in your own country.

8.7 Transport during your stay

The volunteer apartment is about 8 km from the Sea Turtle Rescue Center. Volunteers are covering their transportation cost from/to the Sea Turtle Rescue Center.

There are different options on the ticket that you can purchase. For monthly card you need your passport.

If you are a student (please bring with you your student card):

- Ticket with 90 minutes duration for all the transportation means (except from the airport) and for all destinations in Athens is 0.60€.
- 5 days ticket 9€
- Monthly ticket 15€.

If you are not a student:

- Ticket with 90 minutes duration for all the transportation means (except the airport) and for all destinations in Athens 1.40€.
- 5 days ticket 9€
- Monthly ticket 30€.

8.8 Excursion arrangements

Athens and surrounding is a nice region to explore, although you won't have much free time. When you want you can arrange some excursions on your own or through travel agencies. Here are some examples:

- Tour to one of the islands like Aegina, Poros, Spetses or Hydra
- Temple of Poseidon
- National Park of Mt. Parnitha
- the caves at Peania
- Acropolis
- Etc..



8.10 Currency

The monetary unit of Greece is the Euro.

Cash can be changed in most banks.

There are ATM machines nearby the project camp.

Credit cards such as American Express, Master Card and VISA are accepted in big hotels, shopping malls, and at most shops and restaurants. However, many shops do add an extra charge for paying with a credit card. They can be also used at most banks to obtain cash directly (also for an additional charge).

