



**ECOLOGY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL**

COSTA RICA SEA TURTLE ECOLOGY

OVERVIEW

LOCATION

Costa Rica is one of the most geographically and ecologically diverse countries in the world, despite its tiny size.

While doing field work with leatherback sea turtles, EPI students visit two main field sites: a beach location where leatherback sea turtles nest, and a rainforest biological station. Beach sites are located on the Caribbean coast and are only accessible by boat through beautiful jungle canals on flat water.

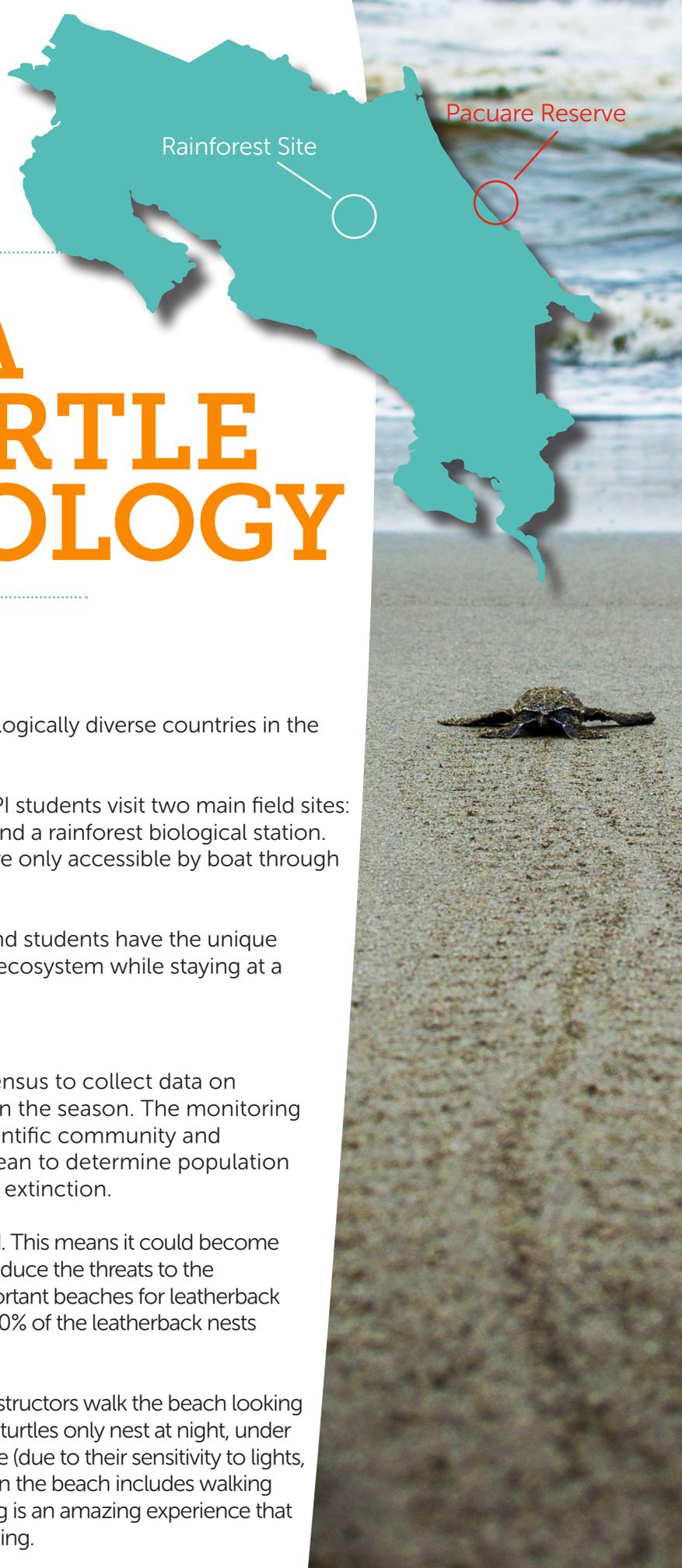
The country boasts 4.5% of the world's biodiversity, and students have the unique opportunity to learn about the flora and fauna of this ecosystem while staying at a biological reserve in the rainforest.

FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT

In Costa Rica, participants conduct a nightly turtle census to collect data on leatherback sea turtles and protect nests laid earlier in the season. The monitoring data collected by EPI students is shared with the scientific community and compiled with turtle projects throughout the Caribbean to determine population trends and strategies to help protect sea turtles from extinction.

The leatherback sea turtle is listed as critically endangered. This means it could become extinct within 10-15 years without direct intervention to reduce the threats to the population. The Pacuare Reserve is one of the most important beaches for leatherback sea turtle nesting in the world, and without protection, 100% of the leatherback nests there would be harvested for human consumption.

During the nights at the turtle reserve, students and EPI instructors walk the beach looking for nesting leatherback sea turtles on 4-6 hour shifts. The turtles only nest at night, under the protection of darkness, and we work on their schedule (due to their sensitivity to lights, cameras are prohibited during night patrols). Each night on the beach includes walking up to 4 miles on soft sand at the reserve. Turtle monitoring is an amazing experience that many students find both physically and mentally challenging.



Leatherback sea turtles are wild animals in critical danger of extinction, and there is no guarantee that students will see a turtle. However, the number of nesting turtles varies significantly during the season, and anywhere from zero to fifteen turtles may nest in a night.

The monitoring, data collection, and beach protection provided by EPI students directly and positively impacts the survival of this species. This is an extremely unique opportunity, and our help is needed by both the biologists and the nesting turtles.

ACADEMIC CONTENT

During EPI's Costa Rica course, students complete 50 hours of coursework and 20 hours of field research in the following subjects:

- Sea turtle nesting and biology
- Ecology of coastal ecosystems
- Field research investigation
- Rainforest ecology
- Biodiversity studies
- Reforestation
- Costa Rican culture
- Cultural discussions and Spanish language

EXCHANGE DAY

EPI brings together students from Costa Rica and the US for a day of sharing and dialogue at a local high school. These visits take place shortly after the students return from the research site. The day usually consists of a cultural exchange (dancing, sports, music, etc.), a lunch of typical local cuisine, and time to hang out and get to know people from a different country. This day is often a highlight of an EPI course.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The focus of this program is experiential education, but the biological research we do is part of a larger cultural, economic, political, and geographic context. Daytime activities incorporate inquiry-based learning, sea turtle biology, and other interesting information. Additional organized activities include:

- Natural history walks
- Art and journaling projects
- Team building and initiatives games
- Rafting trip or zip lining
- Soccer game with local community

Downtime activities often include volleyball, soccer, lying in hammocks under palm trees, painting with water colors, and other fun and relaxing activities. Please be aware that there is no swimming at the turtle reserves due to strong rip tides and sharks.

While at the research beach, there are more than enough activities to keep everyone entertained. Be ready for a busy schedule with lots of fun and excitement.

Program
Partners:



PACUARE RESERVE
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