

VOLUNTEER GUIDE

PANAMA AMPHIBIAN RESCUE AND CONSERVATION PROJECT

UPDATED MAY 2017



A project partnership between: Africam Safari, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Houston Zoo, Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Summit Municipal Park and Zoo New England.



MISSION

Our mission is to rescue and establish sustainable assurance colonies of amphibian species that are in extreme danger of extinction throughout Panama. We will also focus our efforts and expertise on developing methodologies to reduce the impact of the amphibian chytrid fungus (Bd) and proceed to reintroduction trials.

VISION

The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project will be a sustainably financed, Panamanian-led project that has stemmed the tide of extinctions caused by amphibian chytrid fungus and other threats to amphibians. We will lead successful recovery programs for Panama's endangered amphibians and serve as an exemplary model that can be replicated to address the threat of chytridiomycosis to the survival of amphibians worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation project is run by Dr. Roberto Ibáñez, the leading amphibian research biologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. The purpose of this project is to establish assurance colonies of amphibians from Panama that are threatened with extinction due to the invasive pathogen *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd). The Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project operates out of two sister facilities the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center in El Valle de Anton, 90 mins west of Panama City, and the Gamboa Amphibian Rescue Center 20 mins North of Panama City.

Both local and international volunteers are sought to assist with various technical and non-technical aspects of implementing this project. International volunteers for the project will be expected to travel independently i.e. make their own accommodation and transport arrangements. This guide is aimed to facilitate that process for the uninitiated. International volunteers will typically be expected to commit a minimum of 2 weeks full-time, but one-month commitments are ideal, because they allow time for training and afford a chance for our busy staff to reap the benefits of time invested to training you. Local volunteers are encouraged to volunteer for one regularly scheduled day per week and make a commitment of 6 months or more or to volunteer under an intensive internship arrangement.

The volunteer duties will be discussed with the volunteer coordinator on site. Your duties will incorporate basic husbandry tasks such as cleaning tanks, collecting food and feeding frogs. Each volunteer will typically be assigned an additional 'project' to work on that reflects the skills and interests of the volunteer.



Volunteer Lindsay Renick-Mayer performing a spot check on a frog breeding tank.

GAMBOA AMPHIBIAN RESCUE CENTER

The first frogs were housed in modified shipping containers or amphibian rescue pods at the Summit Municipal Park and will be moved to the new facility at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute field station in Gamboa. The new rescue facility consists of two construction phases, Phase one is complete and established 7 shipping containers to house amphibians and food production space, while phase 2 is a planned complimentary amphibian research laboratory that will act as a base for researchers wishing to use captive-bred ex-situ collection for conservation and research purposes.

CONTACT: Jorge Guerrel – email: GuerrelJ@si.edu

Getting There and Around

It is possible to stay in Panama City and drive out to Summit each day, but most people prefer the quiet, cheaper, safer option of staying in the small town of Gamboa, dominated by the Gamboa Rainforest Resort, the Panama Canal Authority dredging unit, and researchers connected to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI). There are occasionally roadblocks and you will be required to produce your passport. Always carry it with you.

The [STRI Crew Gamboa](#) facebook group maintains and updates a fantastic insider [guide to Gamboa here](#). If you are planning a long-term stay, this is the guide for you, and join the group on facebook for social updates and networking with other STRI visitors, interns and researchers.



The Gamboa Amphibian Research and Conservation Center includes a lab and 7 shipping containers. We are expanding the facilities to include a dedicated insect production building.



TRANSPORT

Taxi/ Uber

A cab from the airport to the Summit Park or Gamboa should cost around \$40, and are readily available at the airport. Tip is generally included in the price so you can tip a couple of bucks if you like, but it's not like the US. A cab from Panama City to Gamboa should cost \$20 each way, and you can flag down any cab on the street. Fix a price before you get in though “Cuánto cuesta hasta...?” A cab from Gamboa to Summit can be found at the Gamboa resort around \$20, or a cheaper option would be to call a cabdriver in Gamboa. Cab drivers: 1) Many (Lives in Gamboa) email: gbmany@hotmail.com cell:65223693, 2) Miguel email:tsamatour@hotmail.com phone: 220-4147. Uber also works in Panama about \$20 Panama city—Gamboa.

Car

It is very easy to walk up to a car rental agency in the Tocumen airport after you get off your flight. It is cheaper to rent a car online and manual cars are also cheaper. Be aware that while the daily rental is quite inexpensive, the insurance and other fees add up. You should check with your credit card company to see if they offer any sort of insurance coverage on rental cars. They will often cover collision and you can sign a waiver with the rental company that your credit card will cover part of the insurance and that way you will only have to pay for liability or v.v. Avis: phone: 238 4056, Hertz phone: 238 4081; Budget phone: 263 8777). From Panama City take the Avenida Omar Torrijos highway, along the canal following the signs to Miraflores locks and Paraiso. You will pass the grocery store REY on your right. Continue for 5km you will see Miraflores locks turnoff on the left, and after 7km you will reach Paraiso. From here look for signs to Gamboa and Summit. then continuing towards Gamboa, and after another 5km take a left turn at the Soberania National Park headquarters you can't miss Summit, 1.5km down this road.

Bus

A bus leaves from Albrook Mall to Gamboa, (arriving in Gamboa around 40 mins later) and costs 65 cents. It stops at the Summit Park if you ask the driver. Phone: SACA Bus 232-5529. A cab from Panama City to Gamboa should cost around \$20. Schedule Weekdays: AM: 4:30, 5:30, 6:45, 8:00, 10:00, PM: 12:00, 2:00, 3:30, 7:00 & 9:00. Weekends: AM: 6:00, 8:00, 10:00, PM 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 7:00, 9:00.

A free Smithsonian shuttle for STRI-registered people daily leaves the BCI dock at 4:15 pm and stops at Tupper.

ACCOMODATION GAMBOA AND PANAMA CITY

Panama City

There are many accommodation options in Panama City that fit different budgets. The Holiday Inn Panama Canal near the city of knowledge is a convenient location on the road out to Gamboa.

Gamboa

If you stay for an extended period we encourage you to register at STRI as a volunteer and you can get keys to the Gamboa computer labs and use Tupper library facilities, book accommodation on Barro Colorado etc. for more info please email Jorge Guerrel and with your application and once it is accepted you can visit this link: <https://visitors.stri.si.edu/>

You will need your health insurance number to register. Apartment rentals are about \$250 per month for a bed in an apartment with 2 bedrooms and 4 beds. You have to book a **very long time in advance** to guarantee that you will get space especially in summer. Short-term stays may be easier through one of the options below.

Budget

Ivan's bed and breakfast. Popular on the birding circuit, need to book well in advance, four small but comfortable AC rooms with their own bathrooms have been outfitted on the ground floor of Ivan's home. Delicious breakfasts are served on the patio, with agoutis roaming the yard. A vigorous Audubon Society member next-door has a well-stocked bird feeder. \$49 per person/ night cash only. Airport pickups possible \$45. Wifi \$5 per night. Telephone: (507) 314-9436 Mobile: 507 6688-1936 Email: gamboaecotours@yahoo.com. Web: <http://gamboaecotours.com>

Soberania Research Station Hostel. (AKA Guido's place). Located in the town of Gamboa, this large house has several different room options ranging from \$30-\$60 cash only. Phone (507) 6676-2466, Web: <http://www.advantagepanama.com/soberania.html> email: info@advantagepanama.com.

Air B&B has several alternative options. It's worth looking and seeing who may have a short term rental available.



Typical Gamboa housing and architecture of the Canal Zone.



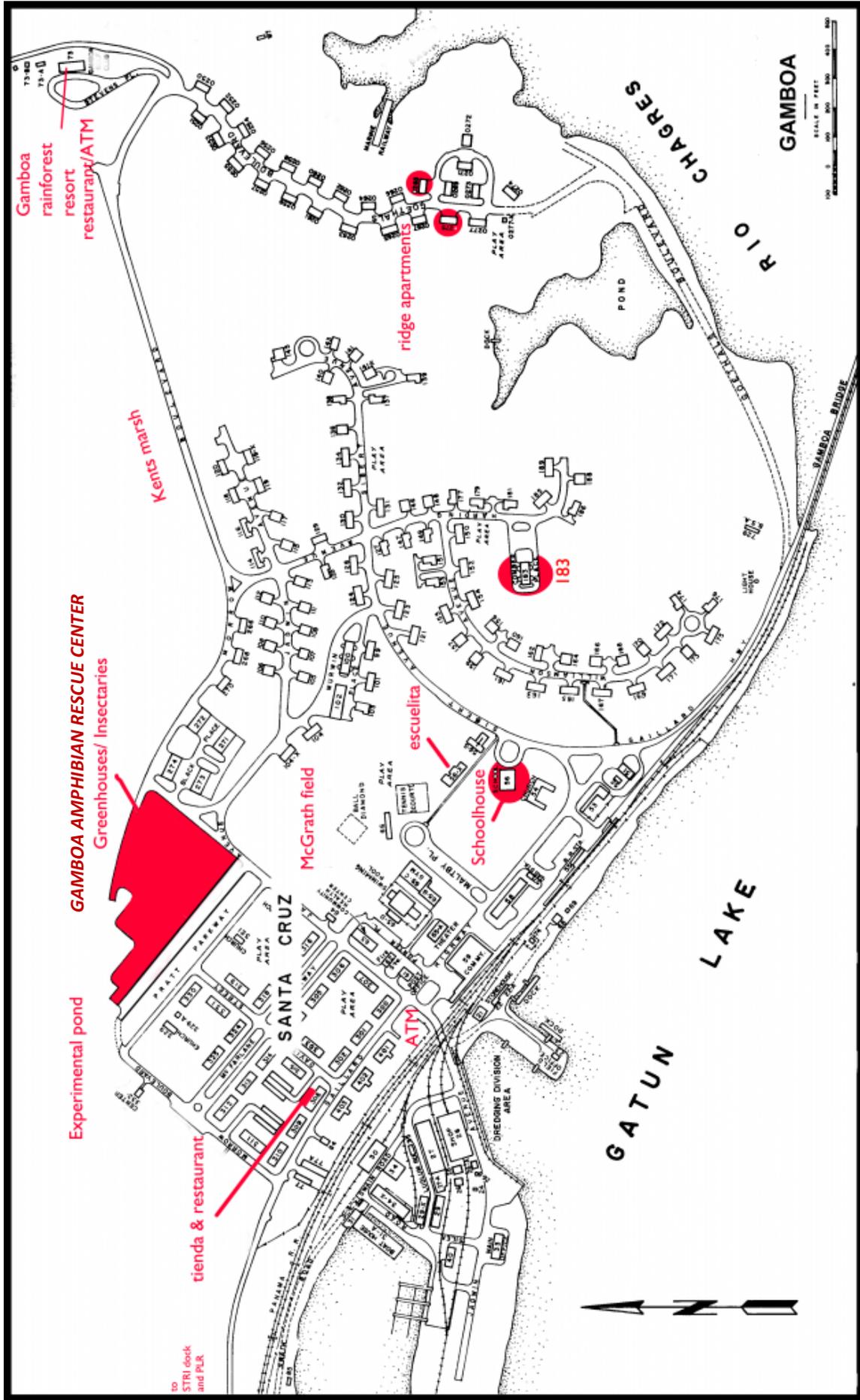
The Gamboa Rainforest Resort

High-end Accomodations

Canopy Lodge B&B. An upscale B&B frequented by birdwatchers with comfortable rooms in an authentic canal-zone property. \$100-160 per night. Email: contactus@canopytower.com
web: <http://www.canopytower.com/canopy-bed-and-breakfast/>

Gamboa Rainforest Resort \$115-160. Pretty standard, but ageing resort with swimming pool tennis court and sweeping views of the Chagres river. Even if you are not a guest here, you will likely spend some time at the resort bar which offers reasonable bar food a la carte (\$8-\$15), or the downstairs restaurant that offers a large daily buffet or a la carte menu, prices are high for mediocre food (\$15-30), but the view compensates. Wifi available using free in the lobby. An ATM is found behind the reception desk. It may pay to look for specials online as they are hardly ever full. If you are registered with the Smithsonian, ask for the Smithsonian rate (should be the US State Department per diem).

Radisson Summit Panama Hotel & Golf. New Radisson, just before you get to the Summit Zoo on the Avenida Omar Torrijos road. It opened in December 2009 and is a luxurious hotel perched on top of a hill surrounded by a golf course. It boasts 3 restaurants: Tero's, Mulligan's and La Jacana. \$70-175 per night 1-800-395-7046 US/Canada Toll-free Telephone: (507) 232-4653 email: hotel@summitgolfpanama.com web: http://www.radisson.com/panamacitypan_golf NB you will need a car if you stay here.



Money

Panama uses US\$ making travel very simple. There is an ATM machine at the Gamboa Resort behind the reception desk, at the entrance to the Canal Authority headquarters opposite the post office, and in the City of Knowledge, a 20 min drive towards Panama City. Best to bring and use cash in \$20 denominations, especially in Gamboa.

Stores

There is a small grocery store in Miraflores about 20 minutes from the zoo. Take a left out of the zoo onto Gaillard Highway, turn right at fork in the road and then go straight with the canal on your right and you will eventually see a Terpel fuel station on your right and the Chinese garden on your left. If you are staying in the town of Gamboa, there is a small tienda in the backyard of Building 308 that is good for essentials like bread and cold beer. Stay straight on the road from the zoo and turn right on Gavis Street (the intersection past the police and post office, right before the bright green and pink houses and the large potholes.)

In Panama City, the most easily accessible grocery store to Albrook Terminal is Super 99. It is across the street from the terminal, outside the exit closest to Niko's Deli.

Food

There is a nightly buffet at the resort for \$35, salad bar only = \$15. At lunch time there are several Fondas near the ACP headquarters, but get there around noon because they run out of food quickly.

Internet

We have wifi at the Gamboa Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Center, ask one of the staff for the current password to log on as a guest. If internet is available free at the Gamboa resort lobby. Longer term volunteers may want to register with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and have access to internet facilities at the Gamboa schoolhouse or building 183.

Other activities

To find out about weekly events and upcoming happenings check out the STRI crew facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1441449679457834/>





San Antonio, a Wounan Village on the Chagres River

Smithsonian Talks

Every week, Smithsonian researchers give talks to share their projects in both Gamboa and Panama City. On Monday, the seminars are held at 4.00 pm at the Schoolhouse in Gamboa and Tuesday at 4.00 at Tupper in Panama City. After the talk there is a short question and answer session followed by refreshments. It is a great way to meet people and learn about other Smithsonian projects going on in Panama.

Barro Colorado Island

Probably the best studied patch of tropical rainforest in the world with a very comfortable accommodations and lab facilities for researchers. The best way to get to Barro Colorado Island is to book ahead and get a tour through STRI, http://www.stri.org/english/visit_us/barro_colorado/ or for a bambi seminar and dinner (\$6) that usually takes place every Thursday evening on BCI. The ferry leaves from the STRI doc 5:00pm, returning around 9:30pm. To book a place on the ferry please register first to secure a place <http://www.stri.si.edu/bambi> - keep the electronic ticket to scan at dinner time.

Pipeline road

Excellent birding spot and beautiful forest. Walk in about 4km down pipeline road (keep to the right to ensure you don't land up at the rainforest discovery center). Continue down the road to the second stream for good frogging spot there is a sign "Rio Frijolito" at the bridge. If you do go frogging, please make sure you shower and change into a completely different, freshly laundered outfit before coming back to work – we don't want any Bd hitchhikers. **Bd is present in all the streams around Gamboa.**

Wounan Village of San Antonio

Lanky Cheucarama works for the amphibian rescue project and lives at the San Antonio Village. He can arrange a tour for you for a small fee and have you taken across the river by boat to meet his family and buy hand-made baskets and tagua carvings. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwTRxsO5VE8> Lanky is a talented artisan and he makes taguas of amphibians in our collection, but you need to give him notice as it takes a long time to carve these things. A \$10 contribution to the community is usually requested. Phone: 6544-0016 .

Canal tours/ fishing

Almodio is a local boat operator and friend of Lanky who can help you arrange a canal tour, fishing or wildlife viewing about \$45 per person parties of 3 or more for a morning on the Canal. Whats app is the best way to contact him +507 6637 9503. Bait and rental of fishing gear costs extra.

Casco Viejo

Panama's second capital is the old part of Panama City with incredible Spanish architecture on a small peninsula near the mouth of the Panama Canal. Here you can get great views of the city, explore the historical sites of Panama and enjoy fine dining. You have to pass through one of the worsts, most dangerous parts of town to get there so don't try and walk, cab it or drive.

The Causeway

Lots of restaurants right on the water – the Smithsonian Discovery center at Punta Culebra there is quite nice and offers and excellent vista and is the best place to see wild sloths in Panama. We are also developing a new amphibian exhibit in one of the bunkers there.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Health

Please follow advice from your doctor re: vaccinations and preventative medicine for your trip. You must be responsible for all your own health-care and travel insurance arrangements. In order to register with the project you will need an insurance number.

The Canal Zone is considered to be free from malaria and yellow fever, but precautions should be taken to avoid insect bites as dengue is occasionally reported. Zika is prevalent in the area. Wear long pants in the dry season as chiggers can be a problem. The water should be safe to drink from municipal supplies. It's hot, please wear a hat and sunscreen when outside and insect repellent in the forest. Bring some Immodium and/or Cipro in case you catch a stomach bug. All volunteers registering through STRI will be required to provide their health insurance or travel health insurance numbers as part of the registration process.

- **Centro Médico Paitilla** - Avenida Balboa y Calle 53, Panama 5, Panama City. Telephone: 507-265-8800 ext. 7040
 - **Clínica Hospital San Fernando** - 3a Vía Espana Final, Las Sabanas, Panama City Telephone: 507-305-6300
 - **Hospital Nacional** - Avenida Cuba (entre Calles 38 y 39), Panama City, 507-207-8041
- Hospital Punta Pacífica** Boulevard Punta Pacífica con Boulevard Punta Darién, San Francisco, Panama City, Telephone: 507-204-8041

Other Useful Contact Information (Country Dialing Code for Panama = 507)

American Embassy in Panama City - Demetrio Basilio Lakas Avenue, Building 783, Clayton, Panama City, Panama, Phone: 207-7000, Email: panamaweb@state.gov, Website: <http://panama.usembassy.gov>
Project Director (in Panama) – Dr. Roberto Ibáñez, ibanezr@si.edu cell: 6650-6544

International coordinator (Washington DC) – Dr. Brian Gratwicke gratwickeb@si.edu Phone +1 202.633.0257 (US number).

- **Police** -104 (Gamboa) 276-6256
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (Tupper Center HQ).** 212-8000

Some helpful Spanish words

Frog – Rana
Toad – Sapo
Salamander - Salamandra
Crickets- Grillos
Grasshoppers - Saltamontes
Termites- Termitas
Fruitfly - Mosca
Dirty- Sucio
Clean- Limpio
Wet- Mojado
Dry- Seco
Sick- Enfermo
Healthy - Saludable
Cages(containers)- Cajas
Tanks- Tanques
Leaves- Hojas
Feed – Alimentar
Work - Trabajo



What to Bring

- Sunblock
- Bug Spray (do NOT put it on when you're working with frogs because it is very toxic to them)
- Flashlight or Headlamp and backup batteries
- Sunglasses
- Flip Flops (to go in and out of quarantine easier)
- A pair of crocs to wear in the quarantined rooms.
- Cash in 10s, 5s and 1s since its difficult to get cash from many bank machines and nobody has change (The bank machine at the Gamboa resort has been the most dependable for getting cash with bank cards)
- Small Towel
- Water bottle (you can drink the water along the Panama canal but keep water with you because you will need to drink often after all the sweating you'll be doing)
- Freezer bags to store food and equipment like cameras and binoculars that you don't want to get wet.
- Small pair of binoculars (the birding is awesome, so is the monkeying – is that a word?)
- Camera
- Meds for Diarrhea (ie. Pepto Bismol, Cipro or Z pack), for allergies (i.e. Benadryl), Acetaminophen for just about everything, Triple Antibiotic Ointment w/bandages.
- Rubber boots or snake gaiters—these are required if you are going to be doing any herping in the field. There are many venomous snakes in the field, please take sensible precautions.
- A Guide to Panama with maps, especially of Panama City
- Safety Equipment for Use with Power Tools if you are going down to build tanks or develop infrastructure for the PODS.
- Patience and a Sense of Humor.

What we always need.

If you want to help by bringing things for us from the USA, we always need:

- Brewer's yeast
- Nitrile gloves
- Microscope slides
- Sera Micron tadpole food
- Alcohol-proof markers
- MW113 chytrid testing swabs

Contact Jorge if you want a more detailed list of supplies that would help.

Help us!

Send any recommendations or additions to this guide – gratwickeb@si.edu

Share your pictures on our flickr group <http://www.flickr.com/groups/amphibianrescue>

Join the project facebook fan page <https://www.facebook.com/amphibianrescue> Write a blog post for

www.amphibianrescue.com and submit to gratwickeb@si.edu. Donate online at www.amphibianrescue.com. Tell your friends, Come back again!

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