EPI STUDENT COURSE HANDBOOK 2024

ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

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INTERNATIONAL

Welcome to your EPI course! During your time with us in the field, you'll experience life as an ecologist, explorer, and ambassador. Thank you for joining us on this adventure!

A little about EPI: this all began in Costa Rica in 2000 out of a passion for conservation and education. What we've learned since is that the best chance to create a sustainable future for our planet and for positive, long-term impact, is young people like you, who are engaged and empowered. Two decades later, EPI now shares this vision with thousands of participants every year through programming in five countries and with dozens of science partners.

We're thrilled that you're joining us! Whether you're collecting data alongside scientists or working with locals on a critical conservation project, our programs provide authentic learning experiences that are freed from the constraints of the classroom.

In the end, we hope this is more than just a trip—that your experience is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We hope you look back on this journey for years to come. Once you've returned home, we look forward to providing social and professional networking opportunities and continuing a connection through lifelong stewardship of the planet we all share. Welcome to EPI.

Haley Hanson & Miguel Fuentas
Interim Co-Executive Directors

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EPI IS A NONPROFIT!

PARTNERSHIPS FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

Since our beginnings, we've been connecting students with scientists on active research projects in the world's most important ecological hotspots. Through dedication to our mission—to inspire youth with nature and empower them with science, fostering tomorrow's leaders—EPI has become a leader in conservation education.

EPI connects local schools, scientists, and nonprofit organizations to give young people, like you, the opportunity to do hands-on research and conservation service. We invest deeply in the communities where we work. For us, local connections are central to our mission of strengthening conservation efforts around the world. We work in Baja, Belize, Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands, and Yellowstone and we are proud that most of our participants grew up in these ecological hotspots. For you, this means a deeper, richer, course experience. Involving and empowering the local community, particularly youth, in the work of science is a crucial step in conservation. You're joining a group of more than more than 100,000 young people who have worked with us in the field to protect vulnerable species in critical habitats.

Every EPI program provides hands-on field experience. While each of our sites has a unique focus and theme, they share a common DNA: meaningful field science and thoughtful engagement in local issues.

CONSERVATION

We partner students with scientists to enhance conservation, helping to protect vulnerable species and habitats. Our students get to participate in vital field research in areas rich in biodiversity around the world thanks to partner collaborations.

EDUCATION

At EPI, we change the way youth connect with nature by engaging them with authentic hands-on science that makes a difference in conservation. Learning with EPI—whether across the country, across the globe, or in your community—is a life-changing experience.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

We empower global citizens by fostering cooperation between international and local students, teachers, and scientists. More than 80% of EPI's participants are local residents living near our project sites. For conservation efforts to succeed, the involvement of local citizens is essential.

In a nutshell, we want to help you learn authentic, on-the-ground science so that you can go out and change the world with it one day. We hope you're inspired to become a scientist, a journalist, an artist, a legislator, or a volunteer with the skills to encourage others to pitch in, and do more. We want you to know that you can make a difference—not just when you get your degree or land a job, but **right now and for the rest of your life.**

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ADVENTURE

CHANGES IN LATITUDE, CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

You're going on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to an amazing place with incredible wildlife. You're also doing it with a group of your peers. On most of our trips, this means the beginning of lifelong friendships. But occasionally, tight spaces and spending 24/7 with a group can be challenging. All we ask is that you keep a little patience and flexibility in your back pocket for those challenging moments.

EPI UNPLUGGED

EPI courses are awesome. They're so once-in-a-lifetime, and jam-packed with unique experiences that we refuse to let screens interrupt them. That's right: while on course your thumbs, eyes, and scrolling fingers will get a break from all your devices. No cell phones, tablets, portable video games, or electronic devices of any kind (except cameras!) are allowed on any EPI course.

Trust us, we get it—**it's hard to leave those connections behind.** Our instructors, staff, and leadership team leave their personal devices behind while on course too.

Here's the deal, though: We make it our job to make sure you're having so much fun that you won't even notice that device missing from your hand. If you bring one of these devices for the plane ride, just keep in mind that you'll have to hand it over to your instructor for the duration of the course.

THE THRILL OF ADVENTURE

Adventure and unpredictability might as well be synonyms. We try very hard to do two things for you: Create a full and exciting schedule and be flexible enough to change when we need to. We're headed out into Nature's territory, and sometimes she throws a lot our way. But if you bring a sense of humor and a go-with-the-flow attitude, you'll definitely find the adventure you're looking for!

YOUR INSTRUCTORS

EPI instructors are the heart of our courses. They come from all over the world, and they teach our courses because they love conservation, wildlife, teaching, science, and wilderness training. Collectively, they have a wicked sense of humor and love the thrill of outdoor education. They look forward to meeting you in the field!

SHOW US SOME ♥ AFTER YOUR TRIP!

Share your photos & memories on social, tag us, and use our favorite hashtags:
#EPIinspired, #ecologyprojectinternational

THE **BIG** 5

Here's what you need to know about The Big 5: First, we're serious about them. Second, we will enforce them. And third, if you violate any of them, you may be sent straight home (the cost of which will be your and your parents' responsibility).

1 **NO TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

The use and/or possession of cigarettes, vape pens, or tobacco products of any kind is not allowed and is **grounds for dismissal from the course.**

2 **NO ALCOHOL**

The use and/or possession of alcohol is not allowed and is **grounds for dismissal from the course**.

3 **NO SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OR COUPLING**

Sexual activity of any kind is prohibited while on course. Coupling or pairing off can divide the rest of the group, create cliques, and cause unnecessary tension. We also want the trust of your parents and schools (call us crazy), and we don't think they'd appreciate this kind of activity. And yes, this is **grounds for dismissal from the course.**

4 **NO ILLEGAL DRUGS**

The use and/or possession of illegal drugs is not allowed and is **grounds for dismissal from the course.** (This one's a no-brainer – remember that it's illegal and dangerous, considering that we travel in really remote environments.)

5 **NO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**

We'll admit, this is a pretty broad category. Basically, we don't want to see any behavior that jeopardizes the safety of you, other participants or our instructors or that negatively affects your group's learning while on course. If there's a tiny voice in the back of your head telling you it might not be a good idea, then whatever you're thinking of doing probably falls under this category. Disruptive behavior can be **grounds for dismissal from the course.**

A LITTLE PREP GOES A **LONG** WAY

We've been packing for EPI courses since 2000, so we'd like to think we finally have this packing thing down. Here are a few tips to help you get it right the first time:

- You'll be carrying your luggage through airports, between buses, and maybe even onto boats, so make sure **weight, comfort,** and **functionality are your top three goals** when packing.
- Reference the packing list (on your **Login Page**) to help you stay on track—everyone likes to check things off a list, right? Many of the items on your packing list can be found at the **EPI Gear Store.** Look for the Packing List Item icon to help you while you shop!
- **Stick to synthetic-cotton blends, whenever possible.** Your 100% cotton clothing (like jeans) are likely to get wet and stay wet for the whole course, and that's no fun. Avoid leggings and lycra material because they are thin, and mosquitoes can easily bite through the fabric.
- If you have as much fun as we hope you do, **you're going to get dirty, wet, and sweaty,** so make sure to set aside a set of clean clothes for your return trip—you won't have a chance to wash any clothes until you get home.
- **Bring travel size toiletries.** This will help keep your bag light and make organization a snap.
- **Check your airline's baggage regulations** online for weight limits, baggage fees, and liquid and gel restrictions—you don't want to get to the airport and have to toss important items.

Stay Healthy: We're counting on you to take steps to reduce your chances of exposure to COVID-19 for the 14 days leading up to your course. Wash your hands, practice physical distancing, and watch for any COVID-19 symptoms.

Talk to Us: Let your instructors know if you're not feeling well. We're here to help. And to remind you to wash your hands. Not going to lie—you'll be hearing this a lot.

CAMERAS

Cameras are the one exception to our unplugged policy and there will be plenty of opportunities to capture the amazing sites on your course. Trust us, you'll want your camera at the ready throughout your trip. Be sure to pack them in a Ziploc bag or waterproof case, since they'll be exposed to water, sand, and lots of other elements. We know many of you use your cell phones as cameras but we have found that having a cell phone within reach (even for those with the best intentions) distracts from the course experience, so please bring a disposable or digital camera. We also recommend setting up a photo sharing folder after the course.

MONEY

We've got your food and lodging covered while you're on course with us, and you'll be working in remote places, so you won't need a lot of extra cash. However, sometimes we do stop to buy snacks, and you may want a little ($50-100 should be plenty!) for your travels. If you do not check in to your flight and pay required baggage fees in advance, you will need to be prepared to pay those fees at the airport at the time of check-in.

COMMUNICATION WITH HOME

Parents worry sometimes, and we don't want them to worry about you when you're with us. So, when you arrive at your program site, EPI will communicate with a pre-identified person back home who will let everyone know you've arrived and are in good hands! Remind your parents that when you're on course, our policy is "**no news is good news!**" and that you will be **unplugged** for the duration of course. If you or your parents need to get a hold of each other because of an emergency, we have a robust emergency response system and will facilitate communication.

TRAVEL

Travel can be a bit tricky, so be sure to keep these things in mind as your course draws near:

- Checked baggage fees are **not covered** under your course tuition, so check your airline for any fees you might incur at check-in.
- We strongly encourage you to purchase **travel insurance**, since flight delays, missed connections, and cancellations can happen. In such cases, we do our best to still get you on course, but travel insurance will cover any costs passed down to you from the airline. There are many travel insurance providers (check out Travel Guard or InsureMyTrip).

MEALS

While on course, EPI provides three meals a day. Feel free to bring along a few energy bars or snacks, but please avoid candy, as we will be surrounded by wildlife with a sweet tooth (e.g. ants, insects, rodents, and more!).

We take careful note of dietary limitations or preferences on your medical forms to make sure there's plenty of food for you. If you have food restrictions, please notify us in your precourse paperwork so that we can make any necessary adjustments. Feel free to also bring non-perishable snacks to supplement your meals. Please pack these in a resealable plastic bag, and bring a spare resealable bag to pack out whatever wrappers you pack in.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Under 18? Your meds are collected on Day 1 and administered throughout the course by instructors (except bronchodilator inhalers, epinephrine, and injectable insulin). Adults, you're responsible for your meds, unless you want instructors to store them for safety.

- **Remember:** Bring enough for the full course; keep meds in their original, labeled containers; & record all your meds on your Medical Health History form.

BAJA
DESERT & COASTAL ECOLOGY

Life on the edge of the desert demands sustainability,
and a culture of conservation has taken root in Baja.
EPI's field campus in La Paz is an ideal setting to learn about sustainable living and community education.

Your Baja adventure begins with spectacular views of the Baja California Peninsula from the air. As soon as you step off the plane, your EPI Mexico team and instructors will greet you. For those of you flying into Cabo, you'll then climb aboard the bus and travel to our EPI campus in La Paz, which has multiple dorm-style rooms (by the same gender) with bunk beds and shared bathrooms. You'll get settled into your home away from home and hear details about the week's activities from your instructors.

Your days will be spent exploring the desert ecosystems around La Paz and the Sierra Cacachilas, observing the resilient flora and fauna that thrive in this arid region. In the aquamarine waters of the Gulf, you'll practice your snorkeling skills, conduct an underwater invertebrate census, and contribute to a coral reef restoration project

Sustainable living and community engagement is central to many residents of La Paz, and you'll have a chance to meet with members of a local ecoclub and discuss what it means to them. You'll chat with them about urban green infrastructure initiatives in La Paz—preserving the incredible natural environment that envelops this dynamic coastal community.

Together with your instructors, you'll survey marine invertebrates, learn about both the aquatic and desert ecosystems, and reflect on the relationship between humans, the Gulf of California, and this protected World Heritage Site in the middle of it all.








WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Baja Desert & Coastal Ecology course begins with waking up in your comfortable bed at EPI's state-of-the-art, sustainable campus in the heart of bustling La Paz. You'll enjoy an early breakfast, filled with local flavors before heading out for the day. Daytime activities include a mixture of classroom time, hands-on data collection, and teambuilding fun. You'll spend time hopping between hiking, snorkeling, and exploring the community, with lunch typically eaten "in the field" and dinner back at campus.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	The data **you collect** becomes part of larger studies carried out by local researchers and directly helps increase our understanding of the issues facing this unique ecosystem. The Gulf of California is home to 39% of the world's marine mammal species and to countless numbers of invertebrate species. The work you do with your peers in this program will help support science and conservation in this ecologically rich area. Groups will work with the international marine conservation organization REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation) to conduct fish surveys. You'll snorkel in the Gulf of California and use ID cards to identify the fish you see, counting the number of fish present to get an idea of population size.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	For many EPI-ers, one of the best parts of the course is the cultural exchange—a day where you meet your Mexican peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. You'll get to chat with local ecoclub members, and learn about their culture. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: Sunny and warm! We'll be outside as much as possible, which means you'll need a wide-brimmed hat (baseball hats won't protect your ears and shoulders!) and a rashguard to wear in the water. And, of course, a bottle of reef-safe sunscreen! We'll have large tents set up for eating and games, as well as shade covers on most of the pangas. The water is pretty warm most of the year, but if you visit in January or early spring, we'll provide wetsuits to keep you warm while snorkeling. It does get windy sometimes, so you may want an extra lightweight layer for stargazing and watching the hermit crabs scurry around in the evenings.
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	While staying at the EPI Campus or in hotels, your meals will give you a taste of the local cuisine—delicious, nutritious, and filling. Most breakfasts include cereal and hot breakfast options; lunches might include tacos or pastas, and dinners usually include rice, meat, and salad or fruit. There is always potable water available.
CURRENCY	Most places in Baja accept U.S. currency, so no need to worry about exchange rates!

BAJA
MARINE SCIENCE

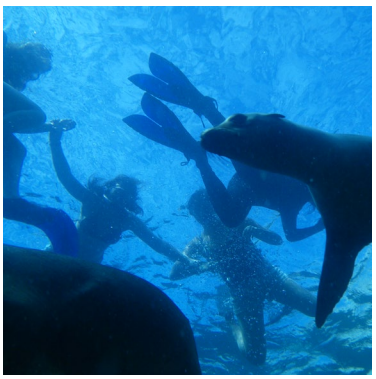
Your Baja adventure begins with spectacular views of the Baja California Peninsula from the air. As soon as you step off the plane, your EPI Mexico team and instructors will greet you. For those of you flying into Cabo, you'll then climb aboard the bus and travel to our EPI campus in La Paz, which has multiple dorm-style rooms (by the same gender) with bunk beds and shared bathrooms. Your group will review and finalize details for your island research journey. The next morning, you'll all enjoy a short walk down to the marina to board the pangas (our travel boats), cast off the dock lines, and head out to Espiritu Santo Island.

Your 90-minute, sun-filled journey to the island may give you a glimpse of playful dolphins, jumping manta rays, sunbathing sea lions, or, for a few lucky groups, even a whale or two.

Once you reach the pristine sandy beach of Espiritu Santo you'll set up your EPI tents and settle into your island home. While on the island, your days will be filled with snorkeling, underwater research, and desert ecology activities further inland. Conducting research on the island offers time for everything from invertebrate snorkel surveys to plankton investigations. You'll often teach each other and use your own field research as a jumping-off point for sharing your projects. You'll explore the desert ecosystem and learn camping skills for protecting and enjoying life along this amazing shoreline. Your days will also include team-building games, contributing to local conservation projects, and trying some of the best tacos you've ever tasted!

Together with your instructors, you'll survey marine invertebrates, learn about both the aquatic and desert ecosystems, and reflect on the relationship between humans, the Gulf of California, and this protected World Heritage Site in the middle of it all.





WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Baja Marine Science course begins with waking up to the sounds of the coastline from your tent. While on the island, you'll sleep in comfy tents right on the shore's edge. You'll enjoy an early breakfast, filled with local flavors before heading out for the day. Daytime activities include a mixture of classroom time, hands-on data collection, and teambuilding fun. You'll spend time hopping between hiking and snorkeling, with lunch typically eaten "in the field" and dinner back at camp.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	The data **you collect** becomes part of larger studies carried out by local researchers and directly helps increase our understanding of the issues facing this unique ecosystem. The Gulf of California is home to 39% of the world's marine mammal species and to countless numbers of invertebrate species. The work you do with your peers in this program will help support science and conservation in this ecologically rich area. Groups will work with the international marine conservation organization REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation) to conduct fish surveys. You'll snorkel in the Gulf of California and use ID cards to identify the fish you see, counting the number of fish present to get an idea of population size.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	For many EPI-ers, one of the best parts of the course is the cultural exchange—a day where you meet your Mexican peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. You'll get to chat with local students, and learn about their culture. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: Sunny and warm! We'll be outside as much as possible, which means you'll need a wide-brimmed hat (baseball hats won't protect your ears and shoulders!) and a rashguard to wear in the water. And, of course, a bottle of reef-safe sunscreen! We'll have large tents set up for eating and games, as well as shade covers on most of the pangas. The water is pretty warm most of the year, but if you visit in January or early spring, we'll provide wetsuits to keep you warm while snorkeling. It does get windy sometimes, so you may want an extra lightweight layer for stargazing and watching the hermit crabs scurry around in the evening.
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	While staying at the EPI Campus or in hotels, your meals will give you a taste of the local cuisine—delicious, nutritious, and filling. On Espiritu Santo, our local island cooking crew will serve up fresh foods with a bit of local spice and flavor. Most breakfasts include cereal and hot breakfast options; lunches might include tacos or pastas, and dinners usually include rice, meat, and salad or fruit. There is always potable water available.
CURRENCY	Most places in Baja accept U.S. currency, so no need to worry about exchange rates!

BAJA
WHALE ECOLOGY

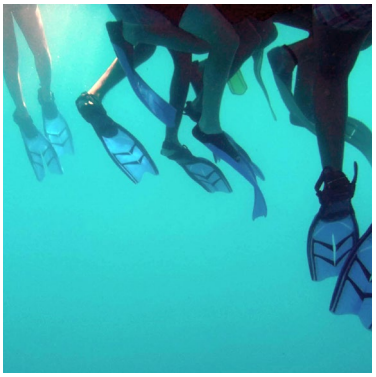
As soon as you step off the plane, your EPI Mexico team and instructors will be there to greet you. If you've flown into San Jose del Cabo, you'll climb aboard a private shuttle and travel to EPI's sustainable field campus in La Paz, where you'll spend the first night of your course. The next day your group will travel to the tiny village of Puerto Chale and set up camp near the village. You're now in the prime location for observing the curious and charismatic gray whale as it makes the annual migration from the Bering Sea to the warm waters of Baja. Your days around Puerto Chale will be filled with sun and salt water as you explore one of the richest marine environments in the world.

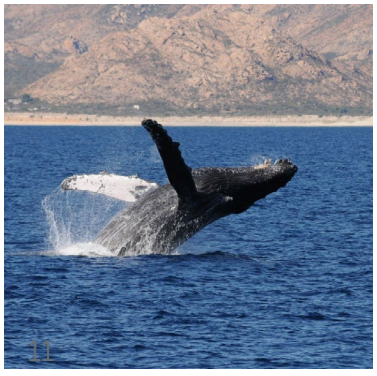
Over the next several days you'll work with our partners at PRIMMA (El Programa de Mamíferos Marinos), an academic organization whose main objective is to contribute to research on marine mammals in the Mexican Pacific. The hands-on field work you'll participate in will help researchers understand how the whale watching tourism industry is impacting the environment, ultimately helping to protect these gentle giants of the deep. Not only will you assist researchers and gather behavioral data on the whales, you'll also get a chance to get very close to this friendly species on daily boat rides around the bay.

For the final days of the course, you'll head north to the growing, seaside city of La Paz. With vibrant colors and beautiful art, you'll explore the city's iconic waterfront, known as the Malecon. You'll also participate in conservation projects to help this city, poised between the desert and the sea, remain a bastion of sustainable living.

With your instructors' guidance, you'll gain a deeper understanding of Baja's marine ecosystems, and you'll have the chance to reflect on the relationships and responsibilities that humans must cultivate to protect the incredible species found here.








WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Baja Whale Ecology course begins with waking up to the sounds of the coastline from your tent. Enjoy an early breakfast filled with local flavors before heading out for the day. Daytime activities include a mixture of classroom time, hands-on data collection, and teambuilding fun. You'll assist researchers with grey whale research while learning about sustainability efforts in the Gulf of California. Expect to spend your time hopping between hiking, snorkeling, and traveling by boat, with lunch typically eaten "in the field" and dinner back at camp.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Grey whale monitoring:** In collaboration with our partners from PRIMMA, you will travel by boat and monitor grey whales and their habitat in and around Almejas Bay. After you collect datapoints on the day's weather, water temperature, and salinity, you'll help researchers count individual whales and collect behavioral data such as feeding, cruising, mating, and nursing. The data you collect will inform larger studies that will help increase our understanding of the issues facing grey whales, and how the region's growing tourism industry is impacting the species. The goal is to help contribute to solid scientific knowledge that will help with legislation, management, and conservation of this incredible species. The Gulf of California is one of the world's richest environments for marine mammal species. It's home to an estimated 39% of them. The work you do with your peers will help support science and conservation in this ecologically rich area.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	For many EPI-ers, one of the best parts of the course is the cultural exchange—a day where you meet your Mexican peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. You'll get to chat with local students, and learn about their culture. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: Sunny and warm! We'll be outside as much as possible, which means you'll need a wide-brimmed hat (baseball hats won't protect your ears and shoulders!) and a rashguard to wear in the water. And, of course, a bottle of reef-safe sunscreen!
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	Your meals will give you a taste of the local cuisine—delicious, nutritious, and filling. Most breakfasts include cereal and hot breakfast options; lunches might include tacos or pastas, and dinners usually include rice, meat, and salad or fruit. There is always fresh water available.
CURRENCY	Most places in Baja accept U.S. currency, so no need to worry about exchange rates!

BELIZE TROPICAL ECOLOGY

You'll do more than you've imagined could be possible in nine days! Get ready for snorkeling, turtle research, bird watching, ethnobotany, boat rides, stargazing, wildlife observing, journaling, game playing, friend making...the list goes on and on!

The country of Belize is rich with cultural heritage. The coastal towns are populated by the Garifuna people and the forested hills are home to Maya villages where people practice traditional ways of life. The legacy of colonialism, for all its scars, has resulted in a multiculturalism with populations of Brits, East Indians, Chinese, and North American immigrants mingling together.

The diversity of the people in Belize can only be rivaled by the land itself. Ranging from tropical rainforest to pine savannah, and from mangrove-lined cayes to coral reef, more than 35% of the region is under protection as a national park, wildlife sanctuary, or other reserve.

During your course, you will learn about unique conservation efforts happening to conserve species ranging from freshwater and sea turtles, birds, bats, and the many species that call the reef home. The specific projects you engage in will depend on the season and the weather, so come with a flexible attitude and rest assured your instructors will take advantage of every opportunity to immerse your group in this incredible landscape!

Everywhere you go with EPI in Belize is going to astound. It's a breathtaking country with two distinct ecosystems: reef and rainforest. Don't worry, you won't have to choose. You'll experience both!








WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Belize Tropical Ecology course begins with waking up to the sounds of the Belizean coastline or the chorus of a tropical rainforest. Lodging is dormitory style with 3-4 students per cabin, and you'll enjoy an early breakfast filled with local flavors before heading out for the day. Daytime activities include a mixture of hands-on data collection and teambuilding fun. You'll spend time on buses and boats, with lunch typically eaten "in the field" and dinner back at the research station.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Terrestrial time:** You'll spend part of your time on course in the rainforests of the Maya Mountain foothills at the Toucan Ridge Ecology and Education Society (TREES) research station. In collaboration with TREES staff, you'll have the opportunity to engage in ongoing bat, bird, macroinvertebrate, and/or herpetology research (depending on season). The data you collect will help researchers develop a baseline understanding of the species that can be found in and around the TREES research station. **Research & exploration in the cayes:** We'll spend the other half of our course in the spectacular Belizean cayes (pronounced "keys"). Belize is home to 400 cayes, from tiny islets covered in mangroves to larger islands with classic white sand beaches. Here we'll have a chance to explore the famous Mesoamerican Barrier Reef — second in size only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. On snorkeling excursions or during service projects, we might spot dolphins, myriad fish species, and stunning coral reef formations. Depending on the season, our activites could include a citizen science project on fish species, conducting a beach cleanup, or participating in coral reef monitoring. All the while, we'll learn about fisheries management, reef health, and the impacts of coastal erosion and climate change on this fragile ecosystem.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	When we can, we build a cultural exchange experience into your course—such as working with a local community group to plant trees or clean up trash, or participate in a traditional Kriol drum sambai. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	Weather prediction: Sunny and warm! Belize is in the tropics, so rain showers are always possible, but during the dry season (February through May), you can anticipate high daytime temps and evenings that *might* be cool enough for a light sweatshirt. Expect more rain and humidity during the wet season (June to August), so don't forget your raincoat. We'll be outside as much as possible, which means you'll also need a wide brimmed hat (baseball hats won't protect your ears and shoulders!) and a rashguard to wear in the water. And, of course, pack a bottle of reef-safe sunscreen!
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	Your meals will give you a taste of the local cuisine—including fried chicken, plantains, rice, beans, stewed meats and vegetables, fresh fruit, fresh juice, and enormous breakfasts.
CURRENCY	Most places in Belize accept U.S. currency, but it's critical to bring smaller, crisp bills without tears as vendors can be particular. Change will be given in Belize dollars.

COSTA RICA
SEA TURTLE ECOLOGY

Costa Rica is one of the most geographically and ecologically diverse countries in the world, even though it only covers 0.03% of the Earth's surface. Approximately 4.5% of the world's biodiversity is held in that small area, which means you'll see a lot of unique wildlife coupled with amazing landscapes!

Your EPI instructors will meet you once you arrive in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. Depending on when you arrive, you will head to a cozy hotel to catch some sleep before the journey really begins or head by bus to one of our field sites.

At our field sites, you'll stay in comfortable but rustic cabins with bunk beds. All accommodations have running water, but not all accommodations have hot water or electricity—be sure to pack a headlamp and extra batteries! Lodging is single gender, with 2-4 participants in a room, and sometimes include a chaperone of the same gender.

We have two primary EPI field sites in Costa Rica: one on the beach and one in the rainforest. Once your group's participation is finalized, we work with our partners and your chaperone to decide on field sites and set a detailed itinerary. Beach sites are located on the Caribbean coast and are only accessible by a 30-minute boat ride through beautiful jungle canals on very calm water. At the rainforest field site, you will experience and learn about the amazing biodiversity of this unique ecosystem. Day hikes and exhilarating night walks through the rainforest will leave you with memories for a lifetime!

Sometimes EPI-ers are surprised that we don't do any swimming. There are strong rip tides at the beach site and crocodiles in the canals, so we like to play it safe and stay on dry land.








WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Costa Rica Sea Turtle Ecology course begins with waking up to the sounds of birds and howler monkeys from your bunk at Pacuare Reserve. You'll spend your action-packed days (and nights!) with sea turtle and rainforest field research, games, and turtle census data collection. When you're not assisting with data collection, you might participate in a cultural exchange with local students, take a guided rainforest hike, or simply relax and draw or journal about your experience.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Leatherback sea turtle monitoring:** Leatherback sea turtles are a vulnerable species with the lowest hatching success of all sea turtle species. You will help Pacuare Reserve biologists search the beach, locate turtles, collect biometric data, and monitor nest placement. Depending on the time of the season, you might also work with leatherback hatchlings or green and hawksbill adult turtles. You'll walk the beach at night with trained research assistants looking for adult turtles that have come ashore to lay eggs. The nighttime beach walks usually last between 4-6 hours and have to be done without lights, including camera flashes. We encourage you to get fit before heading on course so you aren't too tired to participate in this amazing experience. **Lepidopteran research:** Depending on where you're staying, some groups will visit a butterfly garden, help prepare bait, and practice how to safely handle butterflies alongside a butterfly specialist. Once in the study site, you will walk along a transect checking traps and collecting butterflies. You'll work in small groups to check 10 butterfly stations along the transect. Each station has two traps: one in the canopy and one in the understory. Groups will collect the butterfly, label the sample, replace the bait, and fix the trap if needed. At night, you'll also observe a light trap for moths.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	For many EPI-ers, one of the best parts of the course is the cultural exchange—a day where you meet your Costa Rican peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. You'll get to chat with local students, and learn about their culture. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: Costa Rica is pretty pleasant all year round, and you'll probably get lots of sunshine. Average temperatures are 70-90° F with 60-90% humidity. However, the rainy season begins around mid-March, so don't be surprised if it rains (bring a raincoat!).
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	Costa Rican cuisine is characterized by (lots of!) rice and beans, with meat, salad, vegetables, sweet plantain, and delicious fresh fruit on the side.
CURRENCY	Most places in Costa Rica accept U.S. currency, so no need to worry about exchange rates!

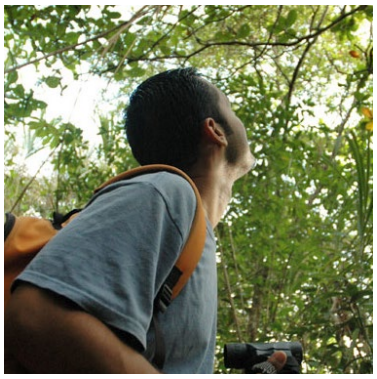
COSTA RICA
FELINES & PRIMATES

We're thrilled that you're joining us in Costa Rica. There's nothing quite like seeing the diversity of the rainforest. The data you collect will help us better understand how to protect the large mammals that call the rainforest home. Costa Rica is one of the most geographically and ecologically diverse countries in the world, even though it only covers 0.03% of the Earth's surface. Approximately 4.5% of the world's biodiversity is held in that small area, which means you'll see a lot of unique wildlife coupled with amazing landscapes!

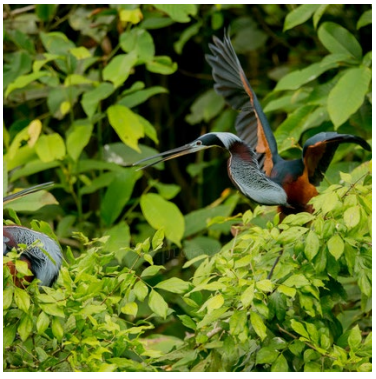
Your EPI instructors will meet you once you arrive in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. Depending on when you arrive, you will head to a cozy hotel to catch some sleep before the journey really begins or head by bus to one of our field sites.

EPI's primary field site is a research station located on one of the world's most important nesting beaches for leatherback sea turtles, but it's also home to more than 300 unique species of wildlife. Jaguars, spider monkeys, ocelots, and howler monkeys all call it home. Pacuare Nature Reserve is a 2000-acre tropical reserve dedicated to conservation ecology, research, and education. Surrounded by canals, accessible only by boat, the reserve's rainforest is rich with diverse flora and fauna.

Sometimes EPI-ers are surprised that we don't do any swimming at Pacuare. There are strong rip tides at the beach site and crocodiles in the canals, so we like to play it safe and stay on dry land. But don't worry! You'll have a chance to get wet on a rafting adventure at the end of your course.





WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Costa Rica Felines and Primates course begins with waking up to the sounds of birds and howler monkeys from your bunk at Pacuare Reserve. You'll spend each day living and thinking like a researcher while you explore rainforest and coastal ecosystems, study wild cats alongside local researchers, and contribute to primate monitoring studies. When you're not participating in field research, you might assist with a sustainability project, practice your Spanish, or embark on a rainforest rafting adventure with fellow students.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Primate monitoring:** Pacuare Reserve is home to three species of monkey: spider, howler, and white-headed capuchin. After you learn about the primate research protocol, you'll walk along the Pacuare trails looking for individual and groups of monkeys. When monkeys are found, you'll collect data on the species, behavior and habitat. **Felines and their prey:** Panthera Costa Rica works to conserve wild felines and the ecosystems they live in. In collaboration with Panthera and Pacuare, you will help monitor felines and their prey using camera traps in the reserve. Next, you'll set camera traps throughout the Reserve's trails to hopefully capture both wild felines and their prey. You'll also search for tracks to get a sense for where the felines are moving throughout the forest. You will learn about Panthera and EPI's collaborative research and the data that's been collected. You'll then help researchers choose locations to set camera traps. Depending on the time of year, you may get to help build the sea turtle hatchery for the upcoming season or help collection data on sea turtle hatchlings.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	For many EPI-ers, one of the best parts of the course is the cultural exchange—a day where you meet your Costa Rican peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. You'll get to chat with local students, and learn about their culture. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
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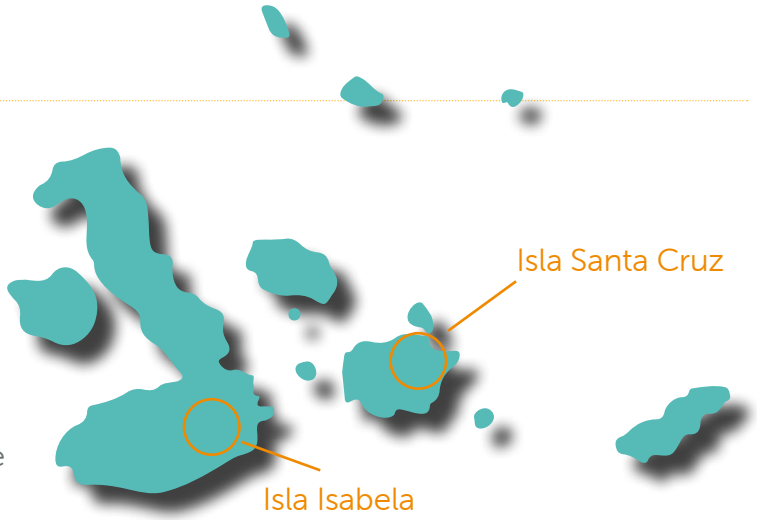
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	Costa Rican cuisine is characterized by (lots of!) rice and beans, with meat, salad, vegetables, sweet plantain, and delicious fresh fruit on the side.
CURRENCY	Most places in Costa Rica accept U.S. currency, so no need to worry about exchange rates!

GALAPAGOS
ISLANDS ECOLOGY



After touchdown in Quito, Ecuador, you'll stay the night at a nearby hotel, then fly to the island of Baltra. From there, you'll take a ferry across the turquoise waters of the Itabaca canal to Santa Cruz. A bus will then transport you to a research reserve, nestled in the highlands.

Your time at the reserve will be filled with activities like tortoise monitoring and invasive species eradication. You'll see local wildlife, like the giant Galapagos tortoises, as well as amazing volcanic land features. The reserve offers quaint, rustic accommodations that vary by course: typically single gender tents and occasionally shared rooms (boys and girls will have different rooms) and shared bathrooms with cold water.

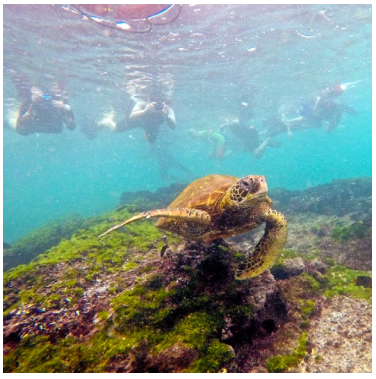
Next, we journey to Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the Galapagos Islands. Puerto Ayora is warmer, so days will include sun and intense heat. Here, we'll stay in a cozy hotel with air conditioning, hot water, and a private bathroom. Throughout your Galapagos course, you'll participate in fun & interactive lessons on wildlife, ecology, and island history. You might know that the Galapagos Islands are a volcanic formation, but did you know that this means they have thousands of underground lava tunnels? You'll also head into the field to meet the most iconic animal of the archipelago, the giant tortoise, as well as learn how to help control invasive species like the giant African snail and blackberry plants that threaten the local ecosystem.

From Puerto Ayora, we'll head to Isla Isabela, at the west end of the Galapagos archipelago. Your home base in Puerto Villamil is a charming hotel close to kayaking, hiking, and research activities on this wild volcanic island.









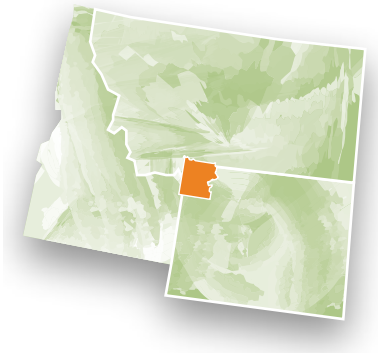
WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Galapagos Islands Ecology course begins with waking up at a remote field station in the Galapagos highlands. Daytime activities could include studying tortoise biology, restoring native habitat, and learning what the Galapagos has to teach us about natural selection and other important ecology concepts. Expect to hop between hiking, snorkeling, and learning from your Ecuadorian peers. In your free time, you'll play games and explore the world-renowned Tortuga Bay beach, the Highland View Ranch, and the town of Puerto Ayora.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Giant tortoise monitoring:** Galapagos National Park is using data collected by EPI students like you to assess tortoise survival rates on Santa Cruz Island. You will also collect data for Dr. Tapia from the Galapagos Conservancy. Dr. Tapia is leading tortoise population restoration projects and is studying the ecology, anatomy, and biology of the 11 different tortoise species remaining in the archipelago. You will collect data on two tortoise species for Dr. Tapia: *Chelonoides porteri* and *Chelonoides donfaustoi*. **Seed dispersal study:** As the largest herbivore on the Galapagos Islands, tortoises may act as important seed dispersers by carrying seeds through their dung. This research looks at the effectiveness of tortoise dung as a seed scatter vector and assesses the potential impacts of seed dispersal on the vegetation dynamics of the Galápagos. Of particular interest is the spread of nonnative species such as guava and passion fruit. **Giant African snail collection:** Work alongside field technicians to monitor and collect invasive giant African snails in the field. Learn about proper field techniques and the importance of this work to the health of the ecosystem.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	Meet your Galapagueño peers and exchange stories about home, school, travel, and conservation. Your Galapagueño peers will be your guides as you learn about the island's environmental challenges and successes. We'll spend time chatting with local students, learning about their culture, playing games, and breaking down language barriers. ***The cultural exchange day is dependent on school schedules and a variety of seasonal factors; while we try our best, it may not happen on every EPI course.***
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: As we move around the islands, you can expect temperatures between 66°F to 75°F in the highlands and 73°F to 85°F in Puerto Ayora.
ENJOY LOCAL FOOD	At the reserve, you'll eat fresh Galapagos cuisine with ingredients from the Reserve's garden. In Puerto Ayora and Puerto Villamil, a variety of restaurants offer typical Galapagos cuisine, including: fruit, yogurt, eggs, and cereal for breakfast; soup, chicken, LOTS of rice, salads, fish for lunch and dinner; and fruit for dessert.
CURRENCY	The U.S. dollar is the official currency of Ecuador so no need to worry about exchange rates!

YELLOWSTONE
WILDLIFE ECOLOGY



A grand adventure awaits you on our Yellowstone course. When your plane touches down, you'll emerge in Montana: land of mountains and big sky. Over nine days, you'll experience the diversity of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), from its sagebrush grasslands to its forested mountains, from its alpine lakes to its boiling hot, geothermal pools. Your course will take place in and around Yellowstone National Park, where you'll experience the grandeur of the area and an unbelievable amount of wildlife while helping the park's biologists to collect data on bison, bears, and other ungulates.

Big skies translate to long distances between destinations in this part of the country. We'll travel in large SUVs that can handle rough roads and all our gear. There may be days when we're in the cars up to five hours, but don't worry—the wildlife viewing and scenery is incredible. Along the way, you'll see geysers and bison, participate in wolf observation, hike to an alpine lake, and so much more.

Being inside our vehicles is about as indoors as your experience will get though. We're talking true ecosystem immersion here! Each night you'll fall asleep under glittering stars at our campsite. Camping allows us to get closer to the wildlife we're studying and the landscapes we're admiring. But camping does introduce some limitations too. We know what you're curious about: Will I be able to shower? Will there be flush toilets? The answer to both of these questions is no for the first eight days of the course, but don't fret! These realities are an intrinsic part of the adventure that awaits you, and you're not in this alone. Don't worry, be brave! It's going to be part of the fun. We promise! And on the last night, we'll stay in cabins where there will be access to showers, so you won't have to board your flight home worrying about what you smell or look like.

This landscape inspired the creation of the world's first national park, and for good reason—its wild and fascinating terrain is teeming with wildlife. Get ready to walk among bison, learn about bear management, and scout for wolves. We'll also explore the Yellowstone River up close during an afternoon of whitewater rafting on its mild rapids. Words can't do this adventure justice (good thing you're going to EXPERIENCE it)!







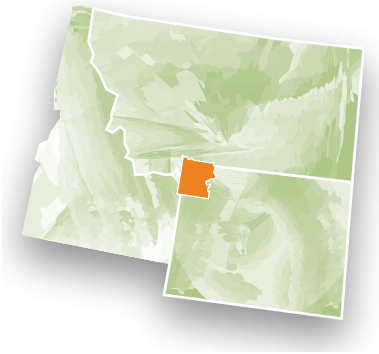

WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology course begins with an early start at your campsite near Yellowstone's world-renowned Northern Range. After a group breakfast, you might spend the day monitoring wildlife and collecting data in the field or participating in sustainability projects that improve wildlife habitat and migration. In your free time, you'll have a chance to explore the park's incredible geothermal features and raft the mighty Yellowstone River with your peers. Expect to eat lunch in the field and cook dinners together as a group back at camp.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Investigating the role of bison in Yellowstone:** Bison have become the dominant grazing force across Yellowstone's northern range, and they share the landscape with other ungulates like elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep. National Park Service (NPS) biologists are trying to understand the role that bison play in Yellowstone's landscape, both by estimating how their grazing affects grassland production and by characterizing how bison diets, migration routes, and use of the landscape overlaps with the four other most common ungulates in Yellowstone's northern range. While on course, you'll collect data that contributes to this overall effort, either by using radio telemetry to track radio-collared animals and collecting fecal samples, by visiting a grazing study site, or by helping process grass samples. **Gardiner Basin amphibian survey:** Amphibians (frogs, toads, and salamanders) are critical indicators of ecosystem health since they are sensitive to pollution, disease, and soil runoff. That's why the Custer Gallatin National Forest, which surrounds the northern corner of Yellowstone National Park, is interested in knowing what amphibians are present on their lands! You'll spend a day investigating a water body that may be home to amphibians, documenting what you find, and assessing the habitat quality. This data will help researchers and managers in the US Forest Service make planning and conservation decisions that protect sensitive species. **Conservation service work:** In addition to wildlife research, expect to help out with service projects while you're in the field, too! Projects might include pulling invasive weeds on US Forest Service land or rebuilding fences with the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Your efforts will help protect critical habitat for wildlife in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE).
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: Weather in the GYE can be unpredictable and you might experience temperatures from 40°F to 90°F during the day and 20°F to 50°F at night—all the more reason to review the packing list and make sure you bring all your layers! If you're joining us for a spring or fall course, it's a great idea to pack additional warm layers (such as hats, gloves, and a winter jacket) as temperatures can be especially unpredictable. Remember, there's always a possibility of snow in the GYE!
CAMPSITE COOKING	Meals always taste better outdoors, and it doesn't get any better than the kind of outdoor dining you'll experience on course. With your instructor's help, you and your course mates will work together to prepare family-style meals, like mac and cheese, stir fry, and burritos. There's a little something for everyone in our menus, and we think you'll enjoy the food preparation almost as much as the eating!

YELLOWSTONE
WINTER ECOLOGY



A two-state adventure—Montana and Wyoming—awaits you on our Yellowstone Winter Course. When your plane touches down, you'll emerge in Montana: land of mountains, big sky, and serious winters. Over nine days, you'll experience the beauty, power, and solitude of winter in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), where bison create wildlife highways through snowy valleys, geothermally heated rivers create crystalline winter sculptures, and hiking happens on snowshoes. Yellowstone is known for its incredible geothermal features—mineral terraces and steam vents. Seeing them in winter is as dramatic as it gets!

At night you'll stay in a lodge along the Yellowstone River. It gets dark early in the winter this far north, but that means time for gathering in the warm lodge, sharing stories from the day, sipping hot chocolate, stargazing, playing games, and diving into the details of winter ecology. Each day, we'll travel in our EPI SUVs into the park to snowshoe, observe wildlife, and explore the park's geothermal features.

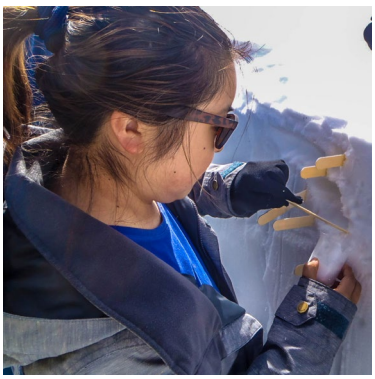
Yellowstone in winter is a peaceful place that, unlike in the summer, belongs primarily to the wildlife. You'll spend your days treading lightly on snowshoes within the park, getting a unique glimpse into this wild world. The outings will include sunrise wolf and wildlife observation in the company of wolf experts experienced in finding wolves on the landscape. You'll learn the art and science of tracking wildlife in the snow, as well as immerse yourself in aspects of winter ecology and snow science.

Snowshoeing is going to be a big part of this experience, but don't worry if you haven't snowshoed before! It's sort of like walking with big shoes on. We'll show you how to get the technique right and make sure to set a pace on our hikes that works for everyone. You'll love how snowshoeing allows us to get into the quieter, untracked parts of Yellowstone, where the chance for amazing wildlife encounters are high.










WHAT DOES A DAY ON COURSE LOOK LIKE?

A typical day on a Yellowstone Winter Ecology course begins at a cozy lodge near the quaint town of Gardiner, Montana at the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. After a group breakfast, you'll strap on your snowshoes and learn about winter field research techniques, observe wolves in their natural habitat alongside the park's wolf specialist, or collect snow and wildlife data that inform ongoing park studies. You'll also have time to relax in a local hot springs and explore the park's geothermal features. Expect to eat lunch in the field and cook dinners as a group back at the lodge.

Closer to your course date, check in with your chaperone for a more detailed itinerary.

YOUR FIELD RESEARCH	**Ungulate resource partition study:** Bison have become the dominant grazing force across Yellowstone's northern range (and have long been an icon of the world's first national park), but they share the landscape with other ungulates like elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep. While on course, you'll collect data that contributes to National Park Service (NPS) biologists' understanding of how the park's ungulate species share the landscape as they search for food, water, and protection from predators. In order to paint a clearer picture of the resources used by each species, we'll snowshoe through the frozen park to sites recently used by ungulates. **Bison grazing study service project:** You might think that you can't contribute to a bison grazing study in the winter, but you'd be wrong! During your course you'll spend part of a day helping the Yellowstone National Park Bison Ecology and Management Office either retrieve or deploy crucial equipment for their summer grazing study, which seeks to understand the role bison play in the grassland ecosystem. Your willing effort will make a huge difference in guaranteeing that the NPS biologists can take care of their equipment to ensure the longevity of their study.
CLIMATE	**Weather Prediction**: The GYE embraces winter fully. During your course, there's a good chance you'll experience temperatures below 0°F. The daily highs will hover around the freezing point (32°F). We're talking about the type of weather where you can see your breath and make snow angels. Chances are you'll experience falling snow, some sun, and a number of incredible sunrises and sunsets! If you haven't spent much time outdoors in the winter, we realize you might have some questions. Rest assured that each night we'll be returning to our warm and cozy lodge, where you'll sleep in a real bed in a heated room with your friends. The lodge is outfitted with flush toilets and showers. We've put together a detailed packing list (on your **Login Page**) that will help you get the proper clothing and gear to stay warm in the winter conditions while we are outdoors each day. If you have questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call us before you leave for the course.
CABIN COOKING	With your instructors help, you and your course mates will work together to prepare family-style meals including dishes like chili, pasta, or stir fry, at our lodge's kitchen. There's a little something for everyone in our menus, and we think you'll enjoy the food preparation almost as much as the eating!

EPI EXCLUSIVE

YOU'RE AN EPI ALUM! WHAT'S NEXT? EPI Alumni have unique access to EPI's network of researchers, science communicators, and other professional community partners who are eager to help you take the next step on your education and professional development journey.

Visit **EPI's Alumni Programs** page to keep up to date on opportunities to join others in sustainability workshops, conservation-based internships and jobs, fundraising campaigns, and more! You can also contact **Sierra Diemling, EPI Alumni Coordinator**, at sierra@ecologyproject.org.

RECEIVE UP TO $500 TO FUND A CONSERVATION PROJECT IN YOUR HOMETOWN!

Apply for an **EPI Leadership Award**! As an EPI alum, you are eligible to apply for a small grant from EPI to start or participate in a conservation-related project. Like what? Here are some examples of what we might fund:

- Attending a conservation workshop or class to learn new marine ecology or conservation skills.
- Organizing a community event, like a park, river, or beach clean-up.
- Starting a youth Eco-Club at your school.
- Organizing a school or community fair to raise awareness about a conservation issue.
- Developing a small research project about climate change and presenting those results to your school or community.

CONTACT EPI – ANY TIME, ANY REASON

Have questions about your trip? Looking for a specific item or gear you can't find on our website? Just want to chat with someone else who is as excited as you are about your trip? Contact us!

(Seriously. We're real people, and we want to hear from you!)

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