



FAQs + TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

The following document is intended to answer some of the most frequently asked questions volunteers have before they arrive in Akumal and to provide you with some helpful tips and reminders on being a volunteer.

ACCOMMODATION

It is up to you to find accommodation while volunteering with CEA. An easy option is to stay in the dormitories close to CEA in Akumal. The dorms are co-ed/shared accommodation with bunks. CEA volunteers have the rate of \$15USD/night.

It is also possible to rent apartments in the town of Akumal or rooms in Playa del Carmen and Tulum and commute to Akumal. Some volunteers have stayed in youth hostels for the first week or two until they found a place to live, particularly those that are here for longer stays. Renting in the beachside area of Half Moon bay is another option, but costs are significantly higher (starting at \$1200USD/month for a studio).

AKUMAL

Known as the *Place of Turtles*, Akumal was once so far off the tourist trail that the only way to access it was by boat or helicopter. It has certainly changed with development and tourism, but it still retains a laid-back atmosphere that keeps people coming back year after year.

It is a quaint and quiet place. There isn't a lot of things to do entertainment wise, so be sure to bring your entertainment to go. If you are looking for city life or more things to do, then Tulum and Playa del Carmen are only 20 minutes away. Being in the middle of the Riviera Maya, there are plenty of ruins, cenotes and beaches to explore and with an extensive network of buses and ferries, there are plenty of places to explore without having to go too far.

ARRIVAL TO AKUMAL

Most of our programs have specific start dates. We advise volunteers to consider arriving a day or two before the start date of their program to get adjusted and acclimatized. We also suggest that you try to plan your arriving flight into Cancun for morning or mid-day so you have ample time to commute in daylight hours to Akumal. Also consider departing flights for mid-day or afternoon so that you have plenty of time to get to the airport. See "**Flights**" and "**Traveling to Akumal**" for more info.

BUGS + CRITTERS

No matter where you live, you can expect visitors—spiders, lizards, scorpions, and the such. They're dangerous only if you mistreat or mishandle them.

If you have allergies to insect bites, be certain to bring appropriate medications. Please inform CEA staff about any serious allergies and medications.

CEA OFFICES

CEA offices are located on the Centro Ukana property facing the basketball court and across from the main arch. We are open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can spot our offices by the painted abstract reef along the bottom and logo by the door.

CLOTHING

The climate in Akumal is usually warm enough that you can live in shorts, sandals and T-shirts and, of course, your bathing suit. Also recommended is a hat. Sometimes there is rain and some nights can get a little chilly. Consider bringing a few warmer items such as a light jacket, sweatshirt or fleece. You may also want a pair of long pants during the winter months. Light, breathable rain gear is a good idea for summer/early fall.

DIVE CERTIFICATION + INSURANCE

Volunteers participating in our dive programs are required to have and bring:

1. A physician's note clearing you to dive
2. Your dive certification card
3. Your dive insurance number/card. (We recommend DAN)

Please get your insurance BEFORE you leave your country.

For divers that have less than 20 dives and/or have not completed a dive within 6 months of the project start date should take a refresher course, which are available at The Akumal Dive Shop and The Akumal Dive Center. Volunteers will be responsible for the cost of the refresher course and/or additional dives.

DORMITORY

For those that choose to stay in the onsite dormitories there are a few things to consider.

The dorms:

- are co-ed and are shared. Each room is equipped with several bunk beds and has its own toilet/shower. There are additional showers at the back of the building.
- have shared common facilities—fully equipped kitchen (gas stove, fridges, cook and dishware / common dining area and garden.)

A few other points to note:

- The basic bedding is supplied (sheet set with pillowcase). It can get chilly in the winter evenings or with the air conditioning on, so packing a light but warm blanket or sleeping bag is a good idea.
- Towels are not supplied. Past volunteers recommend packing two towels (one for the beach and one for the shower).
- It is a good idea to bring a padlock with you as the dormitories do have small lockable cupboards where you can securely store your valuables such as electronics.
- There is also an outdoor space for doing laundry by hand with clotheslines.

DRUG USE

Use of illegal drugs or other illegal substances is strictly prohibited when on CEA property or when performing duties as a CEA volunteer.

EATING + DINING OUT

You should plan to spend between \$10-15 US dollars per meal (around \$100-150 pesos) if you eat in local restaurants. Akumal has half a dozen restaurants, Lol Ha, La BuenaVida, La Lunita, Akumalito (also known as the Loncheria), and QueOnda. Prices for an entrée range from \$65-\$200 pesos per meal.

On CEA property are several restaurants whose rental payments help support CEA. Imelda's Ecocina provides Mexican cuisine; Turtle Bay Bakery serves an eclectic mix of food and sweets; La Cueva de Pescadores serves seafood. Some restaurants give CEA volunteers a 10 to 20% discount.

There are cheaper, local restaurants or stalls in the town of Akumal. And sometimes you will find the local entrepreneurs selling homemade goods (tacos, empanadas, etc) from the back of their vehicles. (If you have a weak stomach, we advise you to hold off on eating from the street.)

ELECTRICITY

Europeans will need plug-in adapters, since the wall plugs accommodate only two-prong plugs with 110 volts. (North Americans will be fine.)

ELECTRONICS

If you are planning to bring your laptop or tablet, it is safe to bring here as long as you use normal precautions. Bring a surge protector as the power fluctuates frequently in Akumal and the surrounding areas.

ENTERTAINMENT

English entertainment can be limited, so it is suggested that you bring your own entertainment with you—music, movies, books, magazines, etc. If you bring paperbacks or DVDs, you can always swap them with other volunteers or leave them behind for others to enjoy.

FLIGHTS

Arrivals

Consider booking a flight that lands in Cancun in the morning or early afternoon. This gives you enough daylight hours to get from the airport and to your accommodation. If you plan on coming directly to the CEA offices, remember that our office hours are 9am to 5pm. Some volunteers spend their first night in Playa del Carmen and they make their way to CEA the following day.

Departures

For logistic purposes, consider booking a mid-day or evening departure from Cancun. This will give you ample time to leave Akumal and get to the airport either directly on a shuttle or via colectivo/bus. (**See Travelling to Akumal** for more information.)

NOTE FOR DIVERS: Diving + Flying

Please ensure you have timed your surface interval accordingly with your return flight.

The Divers Alert Network (DAN) recommends 12-hour surface interval before flying. PADI's "Flying After Diving" guidelines say divers should not ascend a high altitude 12 hours of completing a single dive or 18 hours after doing multiple dives.

We suggest volunteers schedule at least 1 "no-dive" day before their flight.

FOOD / GROCERIES

There are two grocery stores in Akumal with a variety of food, but not a lot of selection or choice. Most people will either go to the Chedraui in Puerto Aventuras or make their way to Playa del Carmen where you will find places like Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Mega. Tulum also has a Chedraui and a supermarket called San Francisco immediately off the highway.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays there is a market with fresh fruit and vegetables located on *la cancha* (the basketball court) in front of the CEA offices. Additionally, there is a Fruteria in the pueblo where you can buy your fruit and veg. Selection will be limited and seasonal.

Buying staples like bread, cereal, meat will be more expensive in Akumal than Tulum, Playa del Carmen or Puerto Aventuras.

GADGETS + GEAR

A few recommendations include:

- a good flashlight with extra batteries (rechargeable is best)
- snorkel gear (it is expensive to rent/buy in Akumal)
- if you are a diver, bring your personal dive gear (mask, fins, wetsuit and dive watch/computer) and factor in rental for other gear. As well, be sure to bring your dive certification cards.
- a laptop, tablet or smartphone are handy items, particularly if you want to stay in touch or like watching movies and playing games. For those that are doing monitoring or report writing, a laptop is required.
- An underwater camera/go-pro if you have one

The conditions of salt + dusty air will take a toll on your gadgets. Please take the necessary precautions to clean, maintain and store them when not in use. CEA is not responsible for loss, theft or damage of your personal belongings.

LAUNDRY

Most volunteers either wash their clothing by hand at the dormitory or rely on laundry services located in the town of Akumal. The price is no more than \$15 pesos per kilogram of clothing. You can drop it off and typically pick it up on a day or two. Please keep in mind that the laundry services may not treat your clothing with as much care as you do.

MAIL

If your family is sending you parcels and/or mail, we strongly advise that it sent by priority package shipping service (FedEx, DHL, Purolator, etc) to the CEA office. The national mail system is notoriously slow and unreliable. Most often items sent through standard mail do not arrive.

MONEY

There is a Bannorte (official bank) ATM around the corner from CEA as well as in the Super Chomak and the Pueblito grocery store. ATM machines are frequently out of money on pay-days (15th and 30th). Always a good idea to do withdrawals before paydays.

All major banks are in Playa del Carmen or Tulum. You can usually pay in US dollars and get pesos in return but with a lower exchange rate. If you wish to exchange money, head to Playa or Tulum.

We suggest volunteers have some pesos on them before they arrive—either exchange in their home country or upon landing at the airport. This will give you spending money for a few days before you get yourself situated and/or can withdrawal money from ATMs or go to a bank.

PACKING LIST

The following list has been compiled based on suggestions of past volunteers.

Dive / Snorkel Gear

- ☐ mask + snorkel
- ☐ fins
- ☐ wetsuit
- ☐ waterproof watch / dive computer
- ☐ sunshirt / rashguard
- ☐ swimwear

Documents

- ☐ dive certification cards
- ☐ medical/travel insurance documents
- ☐ passport
- ☐ vaccination certification
- ☐ medical forms (if required)

It is always a good idea to have a copy of your important documents on you. A great thing to consider is scanning and emailing all of the documents to yourself.

Personal Gear / Electronics / Entertainment

- ☐ flashlight / batteries
- ☐ laptop or tablet
- ☐ camera
- ☐ notebook/pen
- ☐ books, music, movies
- ☐ lock (combination or key)
- ☐ surge protector (for laptop/tablet)
- ☐ adaptor* (2 prong / 110 volts)

**North Americans will not require an adaptor*

Linen / Bedding

- ☐ a light but warm blanket (winter months)
- ☐ towels (1 beach + 1 shower)

Toiletries

- ☐ brand-specific items you can't do without
- ☐ sunscreen (eco-friendly)
- ☐ insect repellent
- ☐ basic first-aid kit
- ☐ prescription medication
- ☐ contact lenses/glasses with prescription

Clothing

- ☐ long sleeve shirt
- ☐ light fleece / sweater
- ☐ waterproof / light rain gear
- ☐ trousers / jeans
- ☐ sun hat
- ☐ sunglasses

The climate in Akumal is hot and humid. Shorts and t-shirts are essential. Pack what you would for typical tropical destination, but remember that it can get cool in the evenings, especially in the winter months.

The sun, salt, and conditions can be hard on your clothes. Keep this in mind if you are packing your very best expensive trendy items.

PRESCRIPTIONS + MEDICATION

Bring all prescriptions and/or medication you need for the duration of your stay.

SECURITY

CEA has a safe that you can use to store important documents such as your passport. It can be accessed only during office hours; but sometimes the office staff has to run errands or take care of other business,

so you might have a short delay in getting access. It is recommended that you carry a copy (image or paper) of your passport with you at all times.

Akumal is safe a place. Regardless, it is just common travel sense to be aware of your surroundings and know where your valuables are. If you are heading to Playa del Carmen or Cancun, know that they are bigger cities, and such have more petty crime. Use your common sense and be street smart.

STAYING IN TOUCH BACK HOME

Wi-Fi service is everywhere, so staying in touch is easy via Skype, Whatsapp, or Facebook. While internet is widely available, the service tends to be a bit slower and less reliable than what you may be accustomed to. For those traveling without a laptop or smart device, a shared computer can be made available at CEA for volunteers to access email.

For volunteers staying a bit longer, another option is to bring your unlocked phone and buy a Mexican SIM card (typically around \$150 pesos) and use a pay-as-you-go system for minutes and data. Another option would be to buy a cheap and basic pay-as-you-go phone here.

Please give your family the following CEA contact information to use for an emergency.
+52-984-875-9095 / communications.ceakumal@gmail.com / info@ceakumal.org

STOMACH ISSUES

Living in tropical conditions, one of the main issues volunteers experience are tummy troubles. Your body must adjust to the digestive-system bacteria. This bacterium may not be harmful, but because you are not used to them, they may make give a case of stomach pain and diarrhea.

We suggest taking it easy as you adjust to the climate and the food. Don't go overboard on the local cuisine and/or food from the street stalls. Always wash your hands before eating and soak your vegetables in an iodine solution (available at grocery stores). Also make sure you are drinking and brushing your teeth with purified water.

SUNSCREEN + BUG REPELLENT

Sunscreen and bug repellent are as essential in Akumal, as they are for a walk in the woods anywhere. They are expensive to buy in Akumal, so be sure to bring some of your favorite potion with you. Please consider biodegradable sunscreen or a rashguard/sunshirt for use in the water.

TOILETRIES

Pretty much anything you need can be found. You can buy items such as toothpaste, toothbrushes and shampoo in Akumal, but the selection may not be great. If you have brands that you prefer, it is a good idea to bring them, since they might be expensive or simply not available. (This goes for feminine hygiene products as well.)

Consider putting together a simple first aid kit including waterproof band-aids and a disinfectant.

TRAVELLING TO AKUMAL

FROM CANCUN AIRPORT

From the airport, you have several options to get to Akumal.

Taxi

If you are confident with your bartering skills, then you can always try to negotiate with the taxi drivers at the airport. The cost from the airport to Akumal by taxi can range from \$90 to \$130 USD.

ADO Bus (<http://www.ado.com.mx/ado/index.jsp>)

Buses leave the airport from every terminal to Playa del Carmen every 30-50 minutes. The cost is around 200 pesos for a one-way trip. Note that the ADO airport bus goes to Playa del Carmen, Tulum, and further down the coast. The ADO bus DOES NOT stop in Akumal, so you will need to get to Playa del Carmen first. Once there, you have a few options to get to Akumal.

1. Mayab bus

Once you arrive at the ADO bus depot in Playa del Carmen on 5th Avenue, stay at the station and go to the Mayab ticket window to buy a ticket to Akumal (around 35 pesos). The Mayab bus will stop on the side of the highway in Akumal. (ADO does not do this.) Be sure to tell your driver that you want to get off in Akumal.

2. Colectivo

This is a shared local van that goes up and down the highway. From the bus station on 5th Avenue, walk a few blocks away from the water. The colectivo stop is located on Calle 2 between 15th and 20th Avenue. The van will also drop you off on the side of the highway of Akumal.

Both the Mayab bus and colectivo will drop you off on the side of the highway. You will need to use the white pedestrian overpass to cross the highway and walk down the street (about 1 km) to get to CEA and/or the dormitories. Depending on when you arrive, you will be given specific information in an email on who to meet and where.

Shared shuttle service (www.supershuttle.com)

SuperShuttle is just one of the many shared shuttle services that you can find and book online. They will take you from the airport to the Akumal while dropping off other passengers along the way.

Private shuttle service

Rather than waiting for a shared shuttle to fill up, a private van can deliver you directly to Akumal. Prices range from \$80USD to \$120 USD, depending on the number of people travelling and the season. A few companies you can find online include:

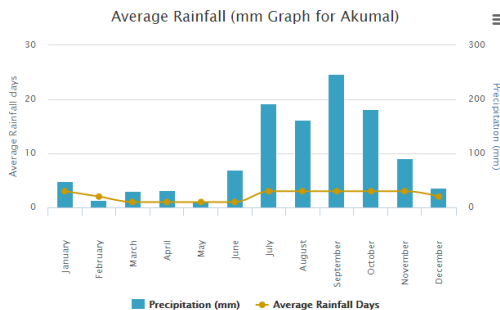
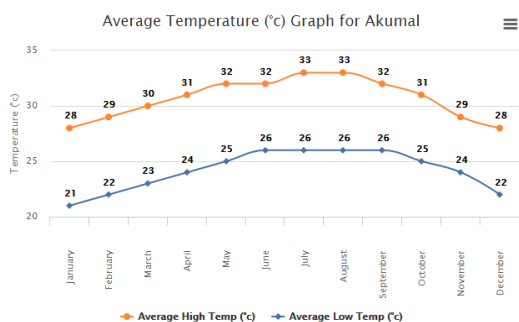
- USA transfers (www.usa-transfers.com)
- Canada transfers (www.canadatransfers.com)
- Resort Hoppa (www.hoppa.com) has been recommended by European volunteers as both shared and private shuttle can be arranged for a cheap rate (20USD/person)

FROM TULUM

From Tulum, you can catch a colectivo or the Mayab bus from the main street in the town of Tulum. Mayab buses operate out of the ADO station and the colectivos have a stand across the street. (See information above for getting from the highway to Akumal.)

WEATHER

Akumal is located on the Caribbean coast of Mexico and as such has a tropical climate. Weather is a bit cooler in the winter months (January to March) and is at its hottest in the summer months (June to September).



YOUR FIRST DAY AT CEA

Your first day at CEA will be easy and light. You can expect to spend a couple of hours at the office. On your arrival, you will complete the necessary paperwork—emergency contact form, agreements and a rundown or review of the rules/expectations and a general orientation to get you settled.

You will meet your program coordinator and together, the two of you will arrange your schedule and duties for the coming days. (You may be required to attend class sessions, do some pre-reading or even get into the field the very next day.) It will all depend on the program and project as well as your skills/abilities and experience.

MORE INFORMATION

Dig around the internet—there are tonnes of resources and sites with material on Akumal. And of course, if you have more questions or need additional information, feel free to contact us at communications.ceakumal@gmail.com

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