

Education Authority Document

Honduras 2027

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to delineate some of the key procedures in place for Operation Wallacea trips to Honduras. When creating the document, reference has been made to the National Guidance produced by the OEAP (Outdoor Education Advisory Panel) in the United Kingdom in addition to guidelines from the Expedition Provider's Association and BS8848 (the British Standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the UK). Additional guidance has been sought from bodies including but not limited to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) DfE (Department for Education), AALA, and numerous Acts of Parliament.

This document may be useful for a number of parties interested in the expeditions, in particular but not limited to: The Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent) appointed by the school or college; the senior teacher(s) accompanying the trip (the group leader); parents or guardians of the students on the trip; students or other participants on the trip.

Operation Wallacea are members of the Expedition Providers Association (EPA) and hold a Learning Outside the Classroom quality badge (LOtC).

2. Objectives and structure of the expedition

Objectives

The Operation Wallacea expeditions in Honduras have two key objectives:

1) to train the expedition participants in neotropical marine ecology and scuba diving (health allowing).
2) to continue gathering data for ongoing population monitoring in the Bay Islands Marine Protected Area on the population of reef fish, invertebrates, and benthic species. At the various marine locations projects aim to answer specific questions related to the populations and communities and assess their responses to different climatic factors crucial for ongoing conservation.

Structure

The structure of the expeditions is a little different to that of many other expeditions or educational trips that are run by schools. Operation Wallacea are running a biodiversity and socio-economic research programme on the Caribbean Island of Utila, and the coastal site of Tela. These surveys are led by university academics from a range of British and North American universities with additional help provided by university students who pay for the experience. The school groups are joining this established survey programme and providing an important part of the survey team by completing detailed reef structure and habitat surveys on each of the 60 sample sites across the whole reef study area.

For the first week the school groups travel to the marine site on Utila to complete a dive training or Caribbean Coral Reef Ecology course. The locations of these sites within Honduras can be seen in figure 1. The address for the Utila base is "Bay Islands College of Diving, By the fire station, Islas de la Bahía, 34201, Honduras". The ecology course consists of two lectures each day that are supported by a land-based practical component, and two in-water practicals

(either diving or snorkelling). The aim is to provide students with an introduction to the marine environment, and to provide them with some knowledge of the methods used to survey coral reefs. Due to logistical restrictions imposed by working in an aquatic environment, students will not be able to partake in active data collection, meaning that the week is much more heavily focused on educational components.

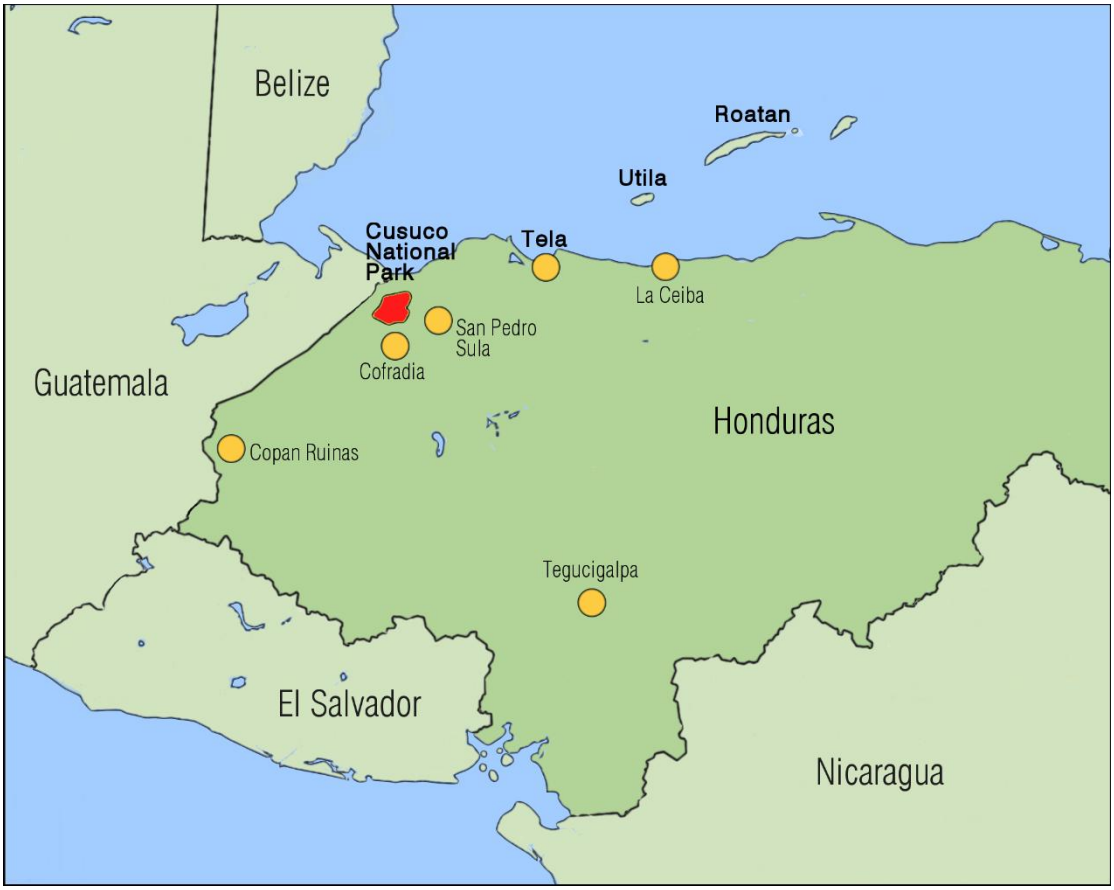


Figure 1 - Location of the marine sites

Details of the travel between the various sites is provided in the transport section of this document.

Start and finish of the expeditions

Groups need to arrange international flights to arrive in Honduras on the Tuesday, before they begin the expedition at 7am the following day. Groups can either fly to San Pedro Sula or Roatan. Return flights can be arranged any time after 16:00hrs on the Tuesday after the final day of travel back from the marine site. Operation Wallacea will be responsible for the safety and welfare of the groups from the point at which they are met outside the airport on the day they arrive, until they are dropped off at the international departure gate at the airport on the day that they leave the country. The only exception to this would be if the group decide to organise their own excursions in Honduras prior to or after participating in the Operation Wallacea expedition. If this were the case, Operation Wallacea would liaise with the school to agree suitable start and finish times and locations, and would be responsible for the safety and welfare of the group between those designated points.

Travel arrangements

Operation Wallacea will book international flights for the group from their country of origin through to Honduras, unless it is specified by the group leader that the group wish to organise their own flights. Operation Wallacea will then arrange transport to and from the expedition sites at the start and finish of the expedition. Most groups will fly in on a Tuesday and depart on a Wednesday and as such their schedule will be as follows:

Tuesday: land in Honduras (San Pedro Sula Airport), travel by bus to Hotel in San Pedro Sula city centre (20 mins approx.).

Wednesday: 07:00hrs Travel to la Ceiba Ferry port (4 hrs approx.). Catch the ferry to Utila (1 hour) then walk to BICD (5 mins).

Thursday morning to Monday evening: Participate in marine based courses.

Tuesday morning: Travel by ferry from Utila to La Ceiba (1hr approx.). Travel by bus from La Ceiba to hotel in San Pedro Sula (4hrs approx.).

Tuesday evening/Wednesday: travel by bus from hotel in San Pedro Sula to airport in time for flight.

3. Booking Process

School and college students have the option to either book as a group, where there is a contract between the school and Operation Wallacea, or as individuals, where the contract is between Operation Wallacea and the participant (and their parent or guardian, if the participant is under the age of 18 at the time of booking the expedition). Once a school group has demonstrated interest in the expeditions, they are given a full presentation about the site where students, parents and teachers have the opportunity to ask any questions they feel are necessary. Following from this the school, or collection of individuals, are given an agreed amount of time to secure their places on the trip with a deposit. Operation Wallacea's terms and conditions are made available prior to booking, and acceptance of those terms and conditions is necessary before the booking can be confirmed.

4. Inclusion

In line with the Equality Act (2010) Operation Wallacea's policy is to make all reasonable adjustments to enable students of all physical and mental ability levels to participate in the programme. Likewise, participants will not be discriminated against on the basis of any protected characteristic (e.g. gender, race or religion). Any specific needs (such as requirements due to religious customs, or those arising from a physical disability) are discussed with the school shortly after the booking has been made. If it is not possible to make suitable adjustments without substantially jeopardising the quality or safety of the programme for the remainder of the participants, then those students unable to participate would be offered a full refund of any monies paid.

5. Risk Management

Prior to the expedition

A thorough assessment of all research sites and activities is completed before the start of each expedition and reviewed throughout via in-house audits. Risk assessment and management instructions are put in place for general activities, for specific activities and specific sites. The risk assessments are published on the Operation Wallacea website and hard copies are available on request, free of charge.

During the expedition

The risk management policies are dynamic and can be amended by the senior Opwall staff on-site should new or unforeseen risks present themselves. All medical incidents and near misses are recorded throughout the season, in addition to the completion of in-house audits. Any major incident (e.g. requiring emergency evacuation or significant deviation from the planned expedition activities) results in an incident report being written by the senior Opwall staff member on-site and statements being taken from parties involved as appropriate. Additionally, the Operation Wallacea Senior Management Team is informed of any major incidents immediately, in case the in-country team should require any further support.

6. Training Before the Expedition

Operation Wallacea staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the expedition abroad. Various joint meetings take place with the Operation Wallacea schools team and the teachers regarding facilities on site and skills required. A training package is sent to each of the schools including the following:

Details of the level of fitness required from the pupils

The level of fitness required by students is outlined in detail in the training presentation. For those students that have limited outdoors experience, professional UK based outdoor adventure companies can be recommended to provide this additional training. Fitness is measured according the British standard bleep test. All pupils are required to reach at least level 4 but level 8 and above is recommended.

Other information

Operation Wallacea will also make available a student handbook (downloaded from the Opwall website) containing full details of the facilities at each site, the learning outcomes for the expedition, and the planned itinerary.

Additionally, participants are given a kit list (which is also available on the Opwall website) and some identification guides for the local fauna and flora. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any aspects of the expeditions, and the preparation required.

Whilst Operation Wallacea aims to ensure that the pupils are well prepared for the expedition, the teachers are responsible for the dynamics and teamwork abilities of the group.

7. Roles and Competencies of Designated Leaders

Qualifications, licensing and technical competency

Operation Wallacea is not eligible for a license through AALA (Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority) as we do not conduct licensable activities and because we operate outside of the UK. Many of the activities organised by Operation Wallacea are research focussed and so no formal qualifications exist. Wherever possible though, the procedures for ensuring technical competency of key staff are in line with AALA recommendations. Where new staff are recruited (i.e. those who have not worked for us before) the selection process includes a review of the CV or resume, a telephone interview, and obtaining at least two positive relevant references from previous employers. The qualifications or experience levels necessary for the various activities are described below, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the key staff.

Role of the teachers

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the pupils' travel arrangements from the school until the expedition start time at the Hotel Victoria Express on a Wednesday at 07:00hrs. Suitable hotel accommodation and airport pickup can be arranged through a respected and trusted Honduran travel company (Maya Temple Tours) and this booking process can be facilitated by Operation Wallacea on behalf of the school group. If the group arrives the night before the start of the expedition then they are advised to stay in the Hotel allocated by Maya Temple Tours (hotels are selected that can provide a full range of services including internet, telephone and restaurant facilities). Once the expedition starts, the teachers will be travelling with the group and responsible for pastoral care issues and checking that the safety procedures run by Operation Wallacea are working in full. At the end of the expeditions the teachers and the group are delivered at San Pedro Sula airport by 16:00hrs on the Tuesday and they are responsible for accompanying the group back to their country of origin. If the group are due to fly the following morning they will be dropped off at their hotel and will then be taken to the airport the following morning by Maya Temple Tours.

During the expedition the responsibility for the safe provision of activities, and organising the full itinerary, rests with Operation Wallacea rather than the teachers accompanying a group, as the teachers are not expected to have specific technical expertise in activities such as SCUBA diving. However, the teachers should, prior to the trip, have familiarised themselves with the activities to be carried out. They also should have ensured that the Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent in their area) is aware of the trip and has been sent the relevant Operation Wallacea documents (e.g. risk assessments and this document) and that the trip has the approval of the senior management team at the school.

Role of Operation Wallacea staff

Venture Leader

The Venture Leader for this project is Frankie Smith. Frankie is the Honduras Marine Project Manager and has worked in positions with Operation Wallacea since 2017. He Has a background in education and has led expeditions in Honduras with Operation Wallacea, having over a decade of research and operations experience.

Frankie will ensure that in each of the locations the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the survey groups and that the various risk amelioration measures are being adhered to, in addition to ensuring that the overall objectives of the project are being met.

Frankie will also ensure that the agreed protocols for the different activities are being adhered to (for example we have a safe diving procedure) and that volunteers and staff alike are properly briefed regarding suitable conduct within their role whilst on the expedition.

Leadership for biodiversity surveys

All surveys will be led by a survey leader at a maximum ratio of 1 staff member to 6 students. The survey leader will have, as a minimum, an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline and experience in leading young people or students in an outdoor education setting. All survey leaders will receive on-site training in protocols for leading small groups on specific dive activities, such as those done as part of the reef ecology course.

Leadership for site transfers

From San Pedro Sula, groups travel to the marine sites on private buses accompanied by Opwall staff members. Groups travelling to Utila travel to the harbour in La Ceiba, from where they take a ferry to Utila town (1hr approx.), where they are collected by Operation Wallacea staff. These groups are accompanied by an Operation Wallacea staff member throughout the transfer and will be met by additional staff on arrival.

Leadership at Bay Islands College of Diving (BICD), Utila

The BICD Camp Manager is responsible for training all the participants in the safety and operating procedures for the site. Rebecca Engel has run the Bay Islands College of Diving since she inherited it from her father who founded it. BICD has managed large groups of volunteers, divers and researchers since it was founded in 1995.

Leadership for diving activities

All dive training is led by PADI qualified Dive Instructors or Master Instructors. Dive training is done at a ratio of 1 Dive Instructor per 8 students plus 1 Divemaster. For qualified divers the ratio is 6 divers per 1 Divemaster. The Utila site is a registered PADI dive centre.

Leadership from marine sites to airport

Opwall staff members travel back to the mainland from Utila with their outgoing groups and they can then be accompanied by a Marine Groups Travel Manager on the bus back to the airport in San Pedro Sula.

8. Medical Procedures

This section summarises the medical and evacuation procedures report which has a much more detailed description of the staffing, First Aid facilities and procedures to be followed.

Information and records

All participants will be required to enter their medical details onto the Operation Wallacea data portal. Details of how to log on are sent out upon receiving the booking from the participant. The data is stored securely and is initially only available to certain Operation Wallacea staff members, and, for groups of school students, the teacher leading the group. All medical forms are assessed by Operation Wallacea. The venture leader may seek to contact the participant to gather further information, which they would then enter on to the portal.

All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the season, these data are collated and a health and safety report is completed and published on the website. This report classifies incidents into 7 categories and allows comparison between the expeditions and other activities. The policy of publication of the accidents and illnesses recorded on the expedition is a unique aspect of the Operation Wallacea expeditions and helps ensure the procedures on site are followed fully.

Medical staffing

Operation Wallacea employ sufficient qualified medical staff including doctors, nurses and paramedics to provide the medical support at each of the field sites. All the medics are required to have at least 18 months postgraduate training with some experience in accident and emergency. There is a permanent doctor stationed in Utila with a clinic also being onsite.

Medical facilities

At our marine site, we are utilising the clinic that is run by BICD, which is run by Dr Randy Buitrago. He trained at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH) in 2017 and has worked as a doctor on the island since then.

Research into medical facilities in country is completed prior to the start of the season by the in-country representative and are checked at the start by the Operation Wallacea medical coordinator or senior medical officer. Operation Wallacea has very close links with the hospitals in San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba and Tela, the recompression chamber on Utila, the emergency services (including the Honduran Red Cross) and the military in San Pedro and Tegucigalpa (who provide emergency helicopter support in the event of an emergency evacuation).

9. Operating Procedures

There are detailed operating procedures for all aspects of expedition management. The main measures used to minimise risk are included in the risk assessments which are published on the website but are summarised below if they are not included in other sections of this report:

Diving

All diving follows protocols that are more conservative than PADI procedures. All training dives are completed with a ratio of either 1 Dive Instructor plus 1 Divemaster to a group of no more than 8 students, or 1 Dive Instructor to 6 students. All qualified divers are accompanied by a Divemaster at a ratio of 1:6. Maximum diving depth is 18m, maximum dive time is 50 minutes, and all divers have to perform a 3-minute safety stop at 5m during the ascent. Recommended minimum surface interval time is 3 hours, where this is not logistically possible students will be required to reach pressure group A ahead of all dives. No night diving is allowed for school group members. If one or more of the groups wish to undertake the Advanced Open Water dive training course they will need to do one dive to no deeper than 30m as part of the course. This dive would need to be completed as the first dive of the day and only one additional dive would be permitted that day. These restrictions mean that all divers are well within the limits allowed for no-decompression recreational diving by PADI.

Snorkelling and swimming

No snorkelling is allowed in open water unless supervised by a staff member with a minimum of Rescue Diver or equivalent qualification and carrying an inflated Safety Marker Buoy (SMB). The Rescue Diver will ensure the group stop every 2 minutes and look around them for boats. Swimming is only allowed immediately in front of the hotel in Utila.

Alcohol

Alcohol is available in Utila. Whilst the school group is under the care of Operation Wallacea no school group member under 18 (the legal age for drinking alcohol in Honduras) is permitted to consume alcohol.

10. Emergency Procedures

A document describing the medical and evacuation procedures in full for Honduras is available on the health and safety pages of the Operation Wallacea website.

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place in all of the sites in Honduras and are designed with the worst-case scenario in mind and have worked well in previous years. All staff will have training on evacuation procedures, and protocols are rehearsed prior to the expeditions starting.

Because of the high variability of influential factors such as weather conditions and nature of potential injuries, a number of different evacuation scenarios must be prepared for prior to the season. All staff are fully briefed in these scenarios.

Operation Wallacea has 3 levels of evacuation as follows: **Emergency** (requiring the fastest possible transfer, usually by air, from the various forest sites to the CEMESA hospital in San Pedro Sula for the forest sites or to the D'Antoni hospital in La Ceiba for the marine sites), **High Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved at the fastest speed possible by land and/or sea to hospital facilities in San Pedro Sula or La Ceiba or the recompression facilities on Utila) or **Medium Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved as quickly as possible without the need to hire special vehicles or boats to the nearest appropriate medical facilities).

In all Emergency or High Priority case where a patient is being transferred to medical facilities they are accompanied by the relevant Medical Officer or someone appointed by the medical officer as fit to accompany the patients. The absence of the Medical Officer from the site whilst the patient is accompanied to the hospital may require the suspension of all activities at the site until the Medical Officer is back on site. In the case of a Medium Priority evacuation (e.g. transfer to a hospital for a confirmatory X-ray) another suitable staff member other than the Medical Officer may be nominated to accompany the patient.

Once a major incident or emergency is identified the Venture Leader will advise Operation Wallacea HQ in the United Kingdom. The Venture Leader will take overall control as Incident Coordinator in conjunction with other senior staff if they are in a position to assist. Operation Wallacea's medical and evacuation plans are designed so that, in a serious incident, Operation Wallacea are able to be self-sufficient (and not reliant on a third party such as an insurer or medical assistance company) in terms of getting prompt and effective care to a patient, or moving that patient to care.

11. Insurance

All participants are required to have medical and travel insurance and to provide these details in advance of their expedition. Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

12. Safeguarding and Child Protection

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children Act (1989 and 2004). This is done a number of ways as outlined below. It is important to note that it is not possible, practical, and in many cases useful, to obtain government supported vetting checks (such as Disclosure and Barring Service) for all staff that students will come into contact with during their time on the expedition. As such Operation Wallacea adopts the following policies where vetting service checks are included where appropriate amongst other safeguarding methods, but are not the sole precaution taken.

Supervision and accompanying adults

Operation Wallacea offers a teacher place with every 8 students thus giving an automatic ratio of at least 1 to 8. For each activity provided by Operation Wallacea in the field a ratio of 1 staff member to 8 students applies.

These ratios do not include other supervisory staff such as guides or cooks. Overall there is a level of at least 1 to 3 adult staff to students on site providing a very high level of supervision, and there are always both male and female staff members on site to assist with supervising groups. Teachers are asked to accompany students on as many activities as possible.

Sleeping and accommodation arrangements

Separate male and female sleeping facilities are available both in the forest and at the marine site. Accommodation for staff members and teachers accompanying the groups is also separate. Bathroom facilities are shared, but toilets are always private, as are the shower facilities. The details of the accommodation are sent out to participants prior to the expedition so that the school has plenty of time to consider any pastoral issues that may arise as a result of the sleeping arrangements.

Minimum number of students

No activities are planned which will involve a single pupil being accompanied or supervised by a single staff member or adult, without another pupil or adult being present. There may be occasions where a one-on-one situation is unavoidable (e.g. a student is struggling with one of the skills required to pass their SCUBA course, and the instructor spends some extra time with them working on that skill). These occasions though are rare, and all staff members are fully briefed on how to conduct themselves when in these situations.

Vetting and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

Staff who work for Operation Wallacea in the UK, and then lead the various expeditions around the World, are subject to an enhanced DBS check. All locations where students are sleeping have a DBS checked staff member in attendance. DBS and other vetting service checks are included where applicable amongst other staff team members. The teachers accompanying these school groups will, at the responsibility of their employer, be vetted through the DBS (or national equivalent system if one is available), and whilst on expedition will stay with the students overnight at each location.
All medical staff are also required to be checked and will have had enhanced checks completed by either their University or place of work. Operation Wallacea use a copy of these as part of the recruitment process of medics.

Codes of Practice

All Operation Wallacea staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed. The Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with participants as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. Operation Wallacea will dismiss staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

Training

All staff are, in addition to their code of conduct, given specific training on suitable conduct with young people. They are made aware of their position of trust and are given examples of

how to behave in certain situations. Staff who do not speak English are read the code of conduct in their own language, and any staff employed by third party providers or partners are subject to the same code of conduct.

Complaints procedure

Any complaint by a school pupil about inappropriate behaviour from any staff member or other student will be treated as a formal complaint and documented. The accompanying teacher will be informed immediately and together with the senior Operation Wallacea staff member on site will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is upheld then any individuals involved will be dismissed from the expedition and a police file created if a criminal offence has occurred.

13. Communications

Marine communications

Utila has land line and cell phone coverage, email and internet connections. Each of the dive boats has a radio and or cell phone that communicates back to the dive operations centre.

Transfers

All bus and vehicle transfers have cell phones with the drivers and accompanying Operation Wallacea/Maya Temple Tour staff also have cell phones on them at all times.

14. Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are subject to stringent protocols. Transport used to move pupils from various sites have been assessed by the Operations Manager and the team in Honduras and only reputable companies with an excellent safety record are used.

Buses

All buses used on arrival transfers and movements to marine sites are contracted by Maya Temple Tours with cell phone communications. A pre-departure vehicle check is carried out which includes checking fluid levels on each of the buses before they are allowed to depart with volunteers. A member of Operation Wallacea staff is present on all transportations to ensure that drivers conform to safe procedures such as no speeding.

Boats to Utila

The Utila Dream is the main transport for passengers from the Honduran mainland to Utila. The ferry carries lifejackets and life rafts sufficient for all passengers.

Dive and research boats at Utila

There is a whiteboard system operating at Utila, so that all boats leaving the centres have to sign out and complete various safety checks (presence of life jackets, oxygen, First Aid kits, communication test etc). The whiteboard contains details of where each boat has gone and the estimated return time. BICD are in contact with all boats via cell phones at all times, and use channel 71 for radio communication.

15. Accommodation and Camp Security

The safety and hygiene levels at all sites are the responsibility of the Venture Leader. Upon arriving volunteers will receive a full briefing detailing safety precautions to take with this in mind. There will be Opwall staff members in the site at all times so that if there are any problems the students will know who to talk to. The participants are given a full health and safety briefing upon arrival in each camp and will only be able to leave the camp site if in a group as per the above operations protocols.

Utila

Accommodation is in the Bay Islands College of Diving, across from the fire station, Mainstreet, Utila Islas be la BahÍa, 1104. All rooms are lockable. We endeavour to ensure that a schoolteacher is located at each floor that is being occupied by pupils. The hotel owners have a safe in which passports and valuables can be stored. Teachers and students are briefed on where to find the expedition leaders during the night and encouraged to find them in any emergency situation.

Hotel Victoria Express

This a hotel at Res. Los Arcos, Blvr. del Sur, San Pedro Sula 21104, and may be used for overnight accommodation by school groups either at the start or end of the expedition. The hotel is always under constant supervision and has a restaurant which may be available and a supermarket / restaurants close by.

16. Integrity and Cultural Aspects of the Expedition

In addition to the drive to collect data for purposes of biodiversity monitoring and specific research projects, Operation Wallacea also attempts to ensure that local organisations and individuals are empowered and supported by the projects. In Honduras we are working with the fisheries and forestry department and offer training and knowledge exchanges with personnel from these departments. Furthermore, there are occasional opportunities for visits from local schools which can not only benefit the local students in that they can learn about biodiversity, but are also a cultural exchange opportunity for students on the trip as they are able to meet and interact with students from Honduras.