

# Sea Turtle Expedition

Volunteer Information



OLIVE RIDLEY  
PROJECT





# Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in our  
Sea Turtle Expedition.

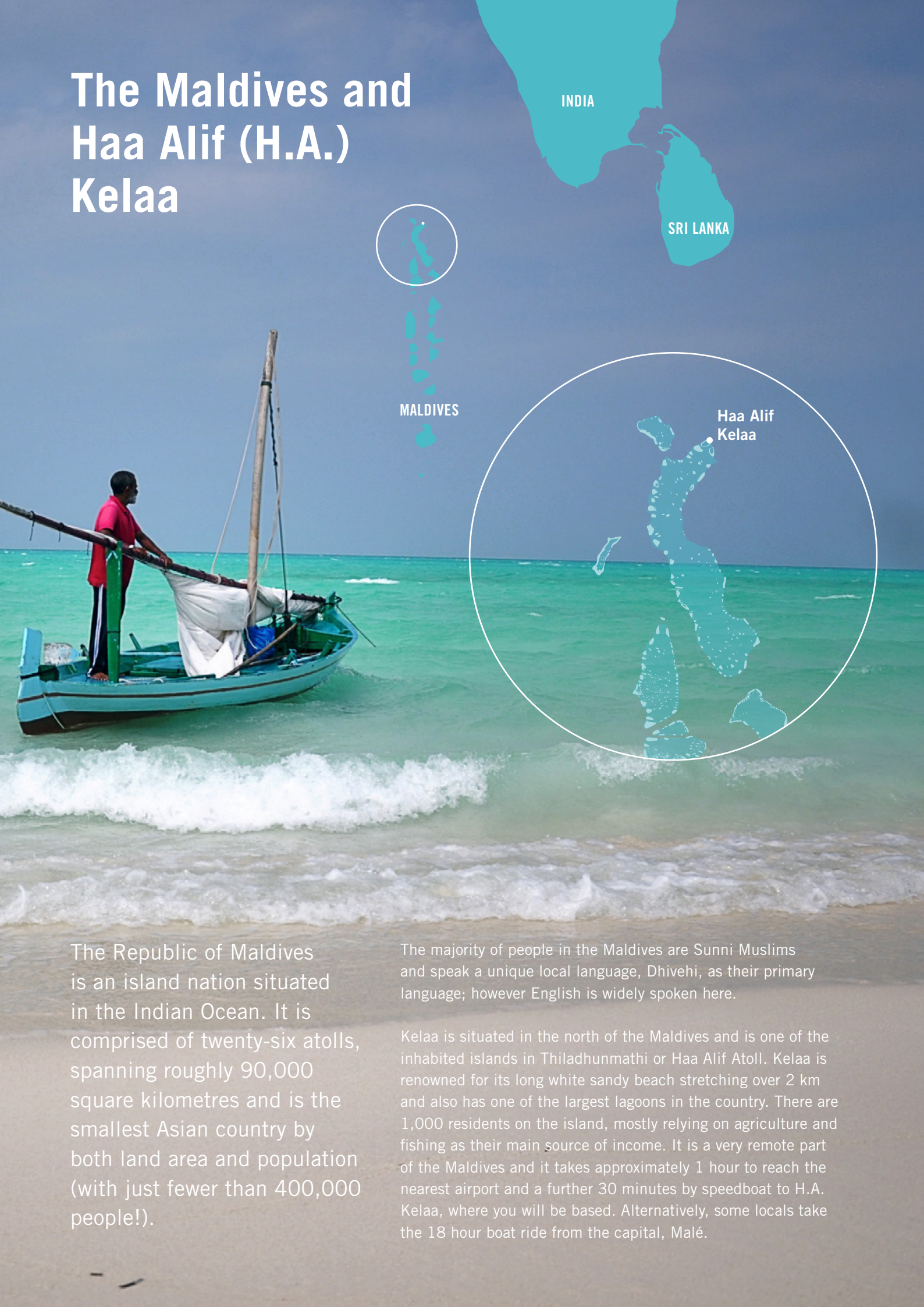
Volunteers are an essential part of ORP's research, and we would very much like to welcome you to our team. As part of our team, you will join our expedition leader and field officer to assist with sea turtle research in the remote atoll of Haa Alif, in the Maldives.

This guide will give you a better understanding of your time with us in the Maldives. Please feel free to e-mail us at **[volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org](mailto:volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org)** with any further questions.





# The Maldives and Haa Alif (H.A.) Kelaa



The Republic of Maldives is an island nation situated in the Indian Ocean. It is comprised of twenty-six atolls, spanning roughly 90,000 square kilometres and is the smallest Asian country by both land area and population (with just fewer than 400,000 people!).

The majority of people in the Maldives are Sunni Muslims and speak a unique local language, Dhivehi, as their primary language; however English is widely spoken here.

Kelaa is situated in the north of the Maldives and is one of the inhabited islands in Thiladhunmathi or Haa Alif Atoll. Kelaa is renowned for its long white sandy beach stretching over 2 km and also has one of the largest lagoons in the country. There are 1,000 residents on the island, mostly relying on agriculture and fishing as their main source of income. It is a very remote part of the Maldives and it takes approximately 1 hour to reach the nearest airport and a further 30 minutes by speedboat to H.A. Kelaa, where you will be based. Alternatively, some locals take the 18 hour boat ride from the capital, Malé.



# About the Olive Ridley Project



**OLIVE RIDLEY  
PROJECT**

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) was established in 2013, and is a registered charity in the UK (Reg. No. 1165905).

ORP have three main charitable objectives:

- 1** To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Indian Ocean in particular, but not exclusively by:
  - a) the removal of ghost gear from the marine environment reducing the negative effects on coastal communities and marine animals particularly the Olive Ridley sea turtle, and
  - b) by promoting the recycling of end of life fishing nets.
- 2** To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the marine sea turtle, in particular, but not exclusively the Olive Ridley sea turtle by the provision of talks, workshops, training and research.
- 3** To promote humane behaviour towards the Olive Ridley sea turtle by providing appropriate care, protection, treatment and security for animals which are in need of care and attention by reason of sickness, maltreatment, poor circumstances or ill usage and to educate the public in matters pertaining to animal welfare in general and the prevention of cruelty and suffering among animals.

*N.B. Although ORP strives to achieve all three objectives you will be predominantly working towards charitable objective 1 and 2 during your time with us.*







# About our Project Partners

## Island Development Environmental Awareness Society (IDEAS)

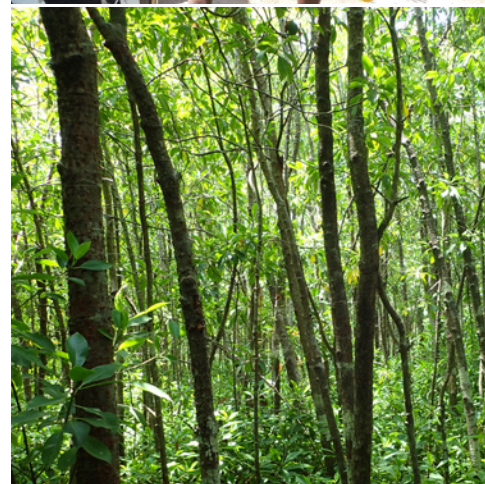
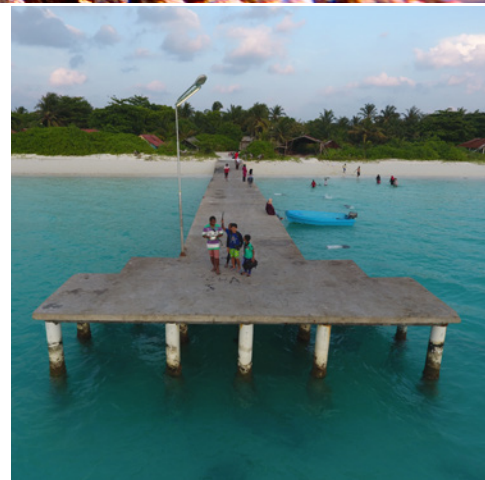
IDEAS is ORP's local partner for the Sea Turtle Expedition project.

Island Development and Environmental Awareness Society (IDEAS) is a non-governmental organisation, founded in 2002 and located on Kelaa. IDEAS has a mission to promote socio-economic development of the community, as well as to promote sustainable island development. IDEAS believes its mission can be achieved through good, democratic, equitable governance and a prosperous society can be built only through achieving constructive civic participation.

Areas of work:

- Education & training
- Healthcare
- Sustainable development and environmental awareness youth development
- Empowerment of women
- Sports & recreation
- Human rights

For more information on IDEAS visit: [ideaskelaa.wordpress.com](http://ideaskelaa.wordpress.com)





# What will I be doing on the expedition?

## Nesting island surveys

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Beach walks (night and early morning) to look for tracks and evidence of nesting turtles. Information to be collected will include: width of track, species, distance from high water level, and if the nest was poached. Nests will be relocated only if the threat of poaching or inundation is high. Nesting females will be measured and photographed (using a red light only) and eggs will be counted only if the female is observed nesting (nests will not be dug up to count eggs). Nests will be monitored for hatching and additional information, such as hatching success and development days, will be collected. This information will feed into the national TurtleWatch Maldives program run by the Maldives Marine Research Centre.

## In-water surveys

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Survey methods will include: set transects, timed swims, manta tows, and ad-hoc surveys for sea turtles. All will be done while snorkelling. We are collecting information on species, size, age, sex, behaviour, as well as environmental data such as weather condition, visibility, and sea temperature. This information will feed into the national TurtleWatch Maldives program run by the Maldives Marine Research Centre.

## Community Projects

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One of the ORP's charitable objectives is to advance the knowledge of local Maldivians on sea turtle habitats and their threats. As such, volunteers will be involved in community projects in H.A. Kelaa, especially marine conservation projects. This will include, working with the local school alongside local partner IDEAS and members of the community to help tackle prevalent issues affecting marine habitats for turtles.



## Sea turtle photographic identification (Photo-ID)

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Foraging and nesting turtles will be photographed for the Olive Ridley Project's photo ID database. Individual turtles can be identified based on the pattern of scutes on their face. Photographing turtles over a long time series allows us to monitor population change, determine population viability, look at age class structure, etc. Results from our Sea Turtle Expedition program will be statistically compared to the more developed areas of the Maldives. Eventually, we hope our results will feed into the development of additional Marine Protected Areas, specifically for turtles. We will also use the data to determine population viability for the area and monitor recruitment of new juveniles. Photo ID can be used as a non-invasive capture-mark-recapture program.

## Marine Debris Management

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A major threat to marine animals is marine debris. Despite H.A. Kelaa's remote location, marine debris continues to disrupt delicate marine habitats and accumulate on local beaches. We will be working alongside our project partners, IDEAS, to improve current waste management methods on the island and reduce the threat of marine debris to sea turtles in the area.





#### MONITORING IN THE MALDIVES

The white dots on the map mark the areas where we have collected, and continue to collect, data on sea turtles. Currently there is a lack of data from Haa Alif Atoll, which is why we need to start monitoring in this area.

Haa Alif  
Kela

## Why are we running expeditions to H.A. Kela?

Our sea turtle photo-ID database consists of around 11,000 sightings of 2,000 identified individuals, which is one of the largest turtle photo-ID databases in the world!

We collaborate with marine biologists, dive professionals, and tourists all over the Maldives to monitor long term residency and population trends. Haa Alif Atoll has very few resources to conduct dedicated sea turtle research. The lack of data in this region is what scientists call a “black hole” and we want to fill this gap so that we can accurately interpret sea turtle population and movements in the Maldives.

As part of the expedition, you will be trained in photo-ID procedures as well as data entry and you will contribute data whenever you observe and photograph sea turtles.

ORP has helped to organize two photo-ID workshops in association with the International Sea Turtle Symposium. We are working with an international group of turtle photo-ID experts to develop a photo-ID software and “The Internet of Turtles”, which will provide a unique set of open source software for monitoring and analysing sea turtle populations around the world.





## Practical skills you will develop

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You will develop many skills during your time with us and here are just a few:

- 1) Marine survey techniques related to sea turtles: Photo-ID, in-water surveys (including documenting behaviour, taking carapace measurements, manta tows, and timed transects), nesting surveys and nest relocation.
- 2) Marine megafauna data collection: We are exploring a remote part of the Maldives and therefore you will be trained on manta ray photo-ID, whale shark Photo-ID, and will record data for the national SharkWatch program. These data will be sent to our friends at the Manta Trust, the Maldives Whale Shark Research Program, and the Maldives Marine Research Centre, respectively, and will further contribute to megafauna research in the country.
- 3) Expedition logistics: You will develop skills that will enable you to work in remote areas with limited resources and contribute to scientific research. Upon completion you will receive a certificate as proof of your experience and knowledge gained.
- 4) Community education: Public speaking, developing presentations and programming for schools
- 5) Basic sea turtle first aid: In the event that an entangled or otherwise injured turtle is found, our veterinarian will provide protocol for basic first aid procedures.
- 6) Marine debris data entry: You will learn which data are important to record when ghost nets are recovered. This will feed into our Indian Ocean-wide net database and assist us in determining where the nets are originating.

## Tutorials you will receive

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Here are a few tutorials you will receive during your time with us:

- 1) Olive Ridley Project mission objectives and research
- 2) IDEAS past successes and future plans
- 3) Maldivian culture and history of Kelaa
- 4) Marine megafauna photo-ID (manta ray and whale shark)
- 5) Sea turtle photo-ID and data entry
- 6) Sea turtle biology and threats
- 7) Sea turtle nest monitoring
- 8) Ghost gear in the Maldives and ghost gear data entry
- 9) Basic sea turtle first aid



## Cost of Volunteering at the Sea Turtle Expedition

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In order to sustain our research, we ask for a donation to cover your expenses and the costs of running the expedition. The breakdown of the donation is as follows:

4 weeks: \$2,995

Your donation will cover return domestic flights and boat transfers from Malé to Haa Alif Atoll, as well as food and accommodation for the duration of your stay. Please note that your donation does not include international flights to and from Malé or accommodations in Malé - should you require.



## What are you funding?

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### Turtle Expedition

As a research volunteer you will be spending a significant amount of time helping ORP explore the atoll and collect data during turtle encounters. Your donation will help provide the research tools necessary for our continued and long term research including our own dhoni (boat) and captain to conduct ocean surveys.

### Operational Costs

Your donation will help us provide management support before and during your volunteering experience. This includes marketing and administration, email correspondence, domestic transfer organisation, monthly bike hire, water provisions and in field management. Local taxes are included as part of operational costs.

### Research and Outreach

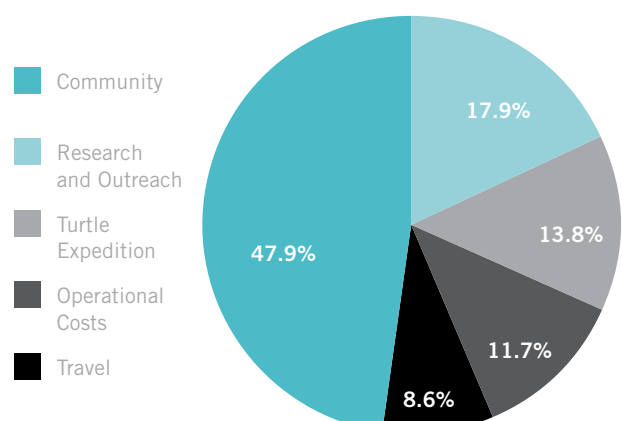
Your contribution will help maintain and expand ORP's projects in the Maldives and Pakistan. We combine scientific research and local community education to encourage a deeper understanding of ghost gear and its impact on sea turtles. We employ local project coordinators in each location and work closely with fishing communities to reduce gear loss and the impacts to sea turtles and their habitats.

### Community

Kelaa is in a remote part of the Maldives and your contribution will help provide resources to the area by supporting local business (i.e., guest house accommodation and food). Moreover, ORP is training a community member in research techniques in order to provide additional opportunities to young Maldivians and to build conservation capacity within the country. We also have a community fund that will improve local resources with particular emphasis on environmental programmes.

### Travel

Return domestic flights and speedboats are included in your donation. The expedition is situated in Haa Alif Atoll and a flight followed by a short speedboat is necessary to get to Kelaa. Views are incredible so keep your camera ready!







## FAQ

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### How many turtles will I encounter during my stay?

This is an expedition to explore the region for sea turtles. We have no data coming from this region and cannot say for certain how many turtles you will encounter during your time with us. You will spend a significant amount of time at sea and therefore chances of seeing turtles are high.

### What other marine life will I encounter?

Part of the adventure is not knowing exactly what we will encounter. This is a remote part of the Maldives and very little scientific work has been done in this region. We have had reports that manta rays can be seen in the area. During our pilot surveys we saw lots of dolphins, sharks and stingrays and locals reports turtles regularly.

### I'm not very adventurous or physically fit. Is this experience for me?

As part of the expedition you will be required to work long days, often in the sea, and will need a basic level of physical fitness. You will have access to the necessary resources; however, your 'homebase' is on a tropical island, and therefore, quite isolated. If you do not think you are particularly adventurous, then this expedition may not be for you.

### How remote is Haa Alif Kelaas ?

It takes about 18 hours by boat from the capital Malé City to H.A. Kelaas. The nearest airport to Kelaas is Haa Dhaal Hanimadhoo Domestic Airport, which is an hour's flight away from the International Airport in Malé. To reach Kelaas from Hanimadhoo, it's a 30 minute speedboat ride. There is a medical centre on the island along with small shops and restaurants. Resources are limited and it is recommended that you bring all medications with you. The expedition is able to cater to vegetarian and vegan diets.

### Will I have any spare time? What can I do when I'm not working?

Yes, you will have one day per week free to do as you wish. Kelaas is famous for its long white sand beach. You can explore the beaches, reefs, or kick back in a hammock and relax. Please bear in mind that the Maldives is a Muslim country and, as such, you are expected to respect local customs on the island. Both men and women should wear clothing that covers their knees and shoulders at all times. Alcohol is not permitted on the island, nor is nude sunbathing.

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Hopefully we've answered most of your questions here, however if you would like some more information, please feel free to e-mail us at [volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org](mailto:volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org)





# OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

READ MORE ABOUT US

[www.oliveridleyproject.org](http://www.oliveridleyproject.org)



Aerial Photographs courtesy of  
Island of Beauty Kelaa

