

Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

Volunteer Information



OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT



COCO PALM
dhuni kolhu · maldives

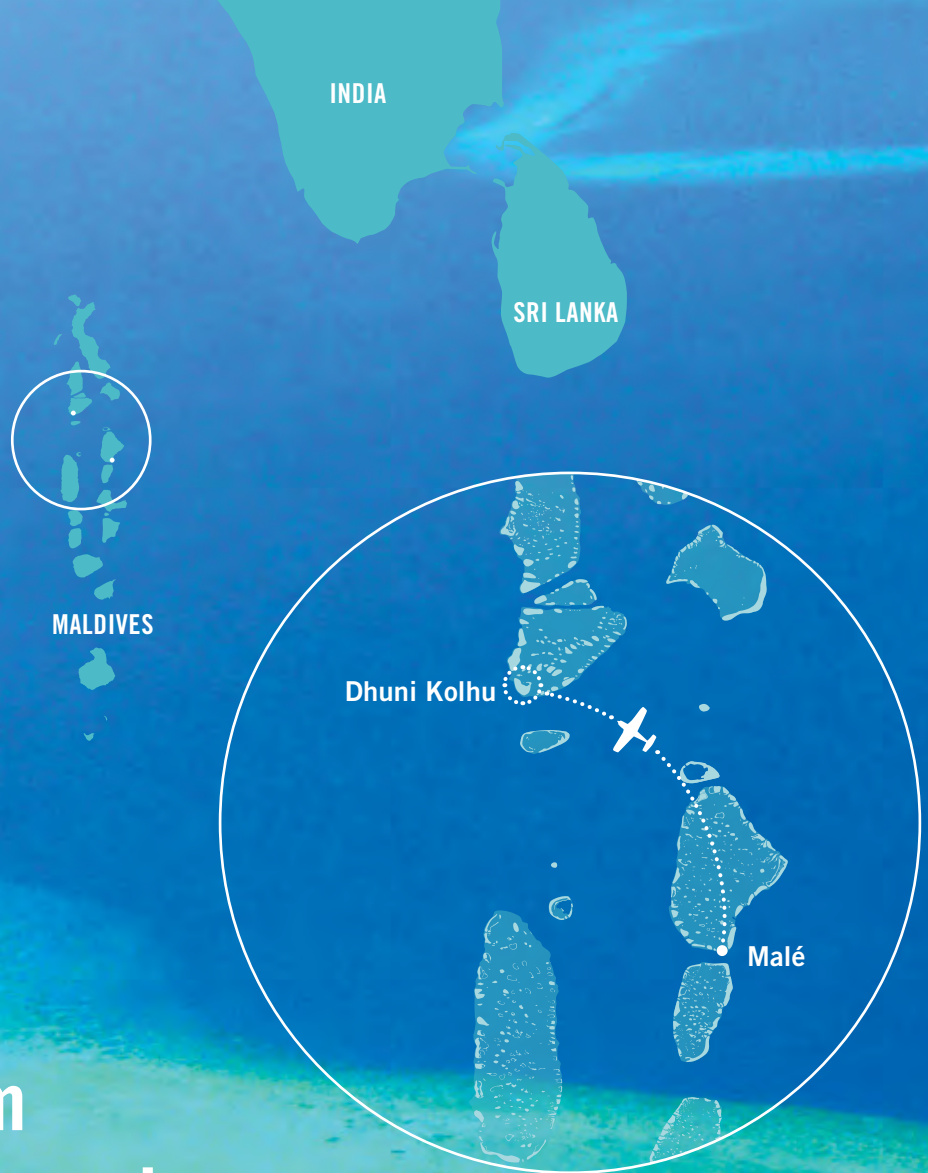
Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in the Marine Turtle
Rescue Centre in the Maldives.

Volunteers are essential for the everyday running of our rescue centre and we would very much like to welcome you to our team. As a volunteer you will work with our veterinarian and with our full time intern, helping to rescue and treat sea turtles found in the Maldives. It is your contribution that enables our staff to continue to provide medical care for these threatened animals and to return as many turtles as possible back to the wild.

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 with any further questions.





The Maldives and Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu Resort

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.

You will fly into Malé, the capital city. Our island is located in the Baa Atoll, a thirty minute sea plane ride north of Malé. Baa Atoll consists of 75 islands, of which 13 are inhabited by locals and 13 are currently resorts. The atoll is rich in biodiversity with plenty of sea turtles (namely green and hawksbill), manta rays, and, overhead, the great frigate bird and fruit bats. The numerous reefs found in the atoll are abundant in hard and soft coral and a huge variety of reef fish species.

We are in the very fortunate position to offer a volunteer programme at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, a unique centre in the Maldives which employs a full-time veterinarian. Through internship placements we also work with Maldivian nationals, who assist our vet in the daily operations at the centre. The centre is located in the Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu resort in Baa Atoll.

Dhuni Kolhu, our island, is roughly 900m by 300m in a crescent moon shape. The resort is owned by Coco Collection Resorts, a Maldivian company, that operates 4 island resorts. We are very lucky to be located here, and the resort has had a very important role in enabling our centre to open!

About the Olive Ridley Project



**OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT**

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) was established in 2013, and is a registered charity in England & Wales (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 3.





THE PROBLEM

In the last eleven years, over 1,020 sea turtles have been reported entangled in ghost gear (abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear) in the Maldives.

The majority of these entangled turtles were olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*); however, green (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) have also been reported. Local fishers, marine biologists, recreational divers, and tourists have all rescued entangled turtles, but many are not so lucky and likely float by unnoticed. Some suffer injuries so severe they are unable to recover without rehabilitation. However, there is hope!

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) opened its first Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in February 2017 with a mission to provide the best medical treatment to all entangled and injured turtles in the Maldives. Transporting injured turtles between atolls and islands can be challenging, but thanks to the relationships we have built with many resorts we can coordinate a speedy delivery for turtles in need of care. More recently, an exciting collaboration between ORP and Trans Maldivian Airline (TMA) provides a platform to transport injured turtles to our centre via their sea planes. We strive to create a greater awareness of our centre among local fishermen, resort staff, and the general public so that more turtles can be safely brought to us.

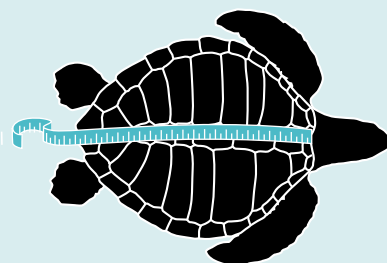
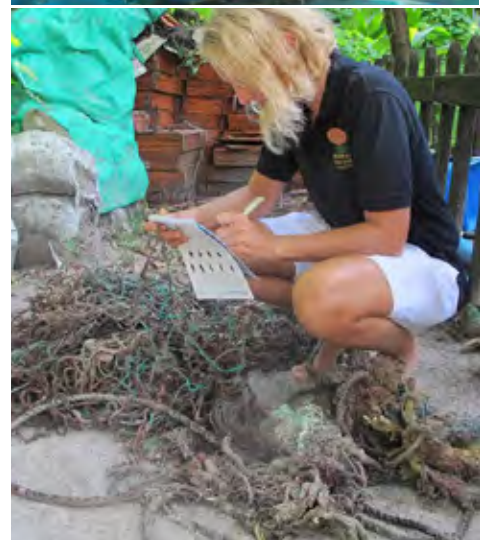
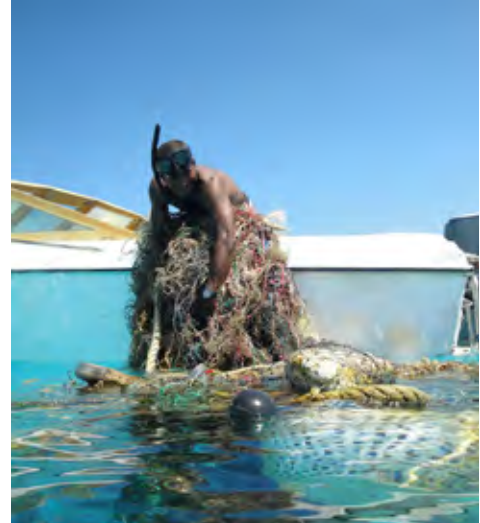


OUR RESEARCH PROJECTS

Under the guidance of the Olive Ridley Project there are several scientific research projects currently being undertaken with which you can assist our researchers.

The first uses the data provided by recovered ghost nets. This is a citizen science project and relies upon those who find ghost gear to input the details of the nets and any turtles entangled on our website. This invaluable information allows us to begin to assess and determine the origin of the nets. ORP can then target those fisheries or geographic areas that are responsible for abandoning or losing fishing gear and provide education to further their understanding on the negative impacts that these nets are having on our oceans. Furthermore, we can determine which net characteristics increase the probability of turtle entanglement and allow us to better inform policy makers and net manufacturers on net design. You will be inputting data when you find ghost nets on local beaches or when out snorkelling.

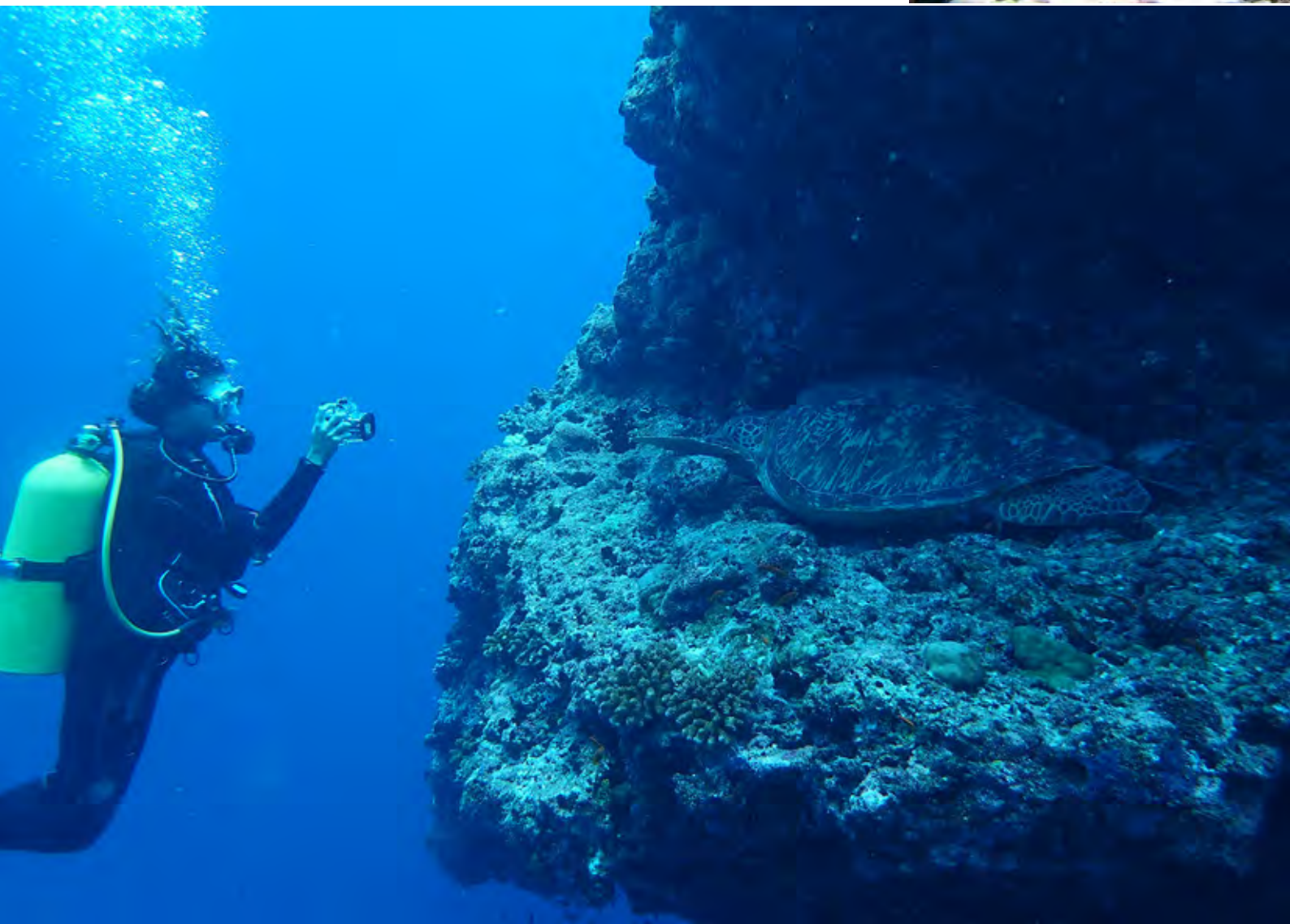
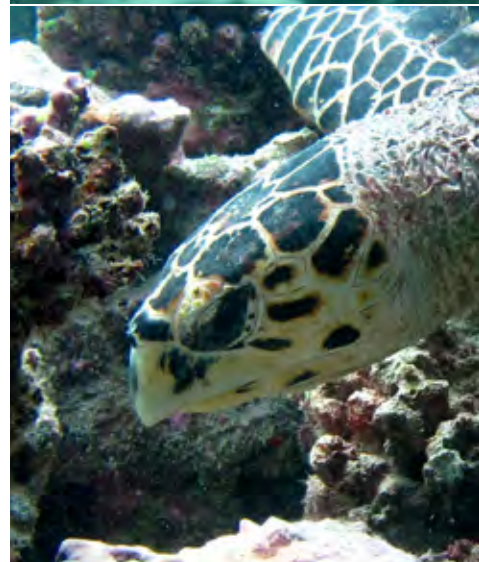
Our CEO, Dr. Martin Stelfox, recently completed his PhD at the University of Derby in the UK. His research focused on the impact of ghost gear in the Maldives. He was able to identify drift patterns of ghost gear and used this information alongside statistical modeling to identify which fisheries are most problematic in the region. This helps guide ORP to be better informed when dealing with the issue. Another part of Martin's research tried to identify to which population entangled olive ridleys found in the Maldives belong. By comparing DNA samples of entangled olive ridleys rescued in the Maldives to neighbouring populations in India, Oman, Sri Lanka, Reunion Island, and Madagascar, Martin was able to pinpoint that these turtles are coming from eastern India and Sri Lanka. Sea turtles that come to the centre may have a small amount of tissue removed and for genetic analyses as part of a research project into sea turtle population dynamics in the Indian Ocean. You will assist the veterinarian with sampling and learn correct sampling techniques.



Another area of our research is photographic identification (or turtle photo-id) of foraging and nesting turtles.

We have a database of over 26,900 sightings of 4,800+ identified individuals and we collaborate with marine biologists, dive professionals and tourists all over the Maldives. The goal of this work is to recognize residency patterns, determine population trends over long time scales, and recognize environmental “hot spots” that could warrant additional legislative protection. ORP has helped to organize two photo-ID workshops in association with the International Sea Turtle Symposium. We have also worked with an international group of turtle photo-ID experts to develop a ground-breaking photo-ID software and “The Internet of Turtles”, which provides a unique set of open source software for monitoring and analysing sea turtle populations around the world. As part of the team you will be trained on photo-id and contribute data whenever you observe sea turtles.

In the past, ORP has produced technical and impact reports for the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the UN, and abstracts, presentations and posters at the International Sea Turtle Symposium. We regularly publish research papers in scientific journals and present our findings at international conferences.





COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

It is the intention of the Olive Ridley Project to provide education to the young generation of Maldivians, to increase their understanding of the incredible oceans that surround them.

The centre is involved with schools on the nearby local islands, Hithadhoo and Thulhaadhoo, and in the future, will provide a scientific syllabus relating to the animals that can be found in the Maldives. The course will specifically focus on endangered animals, such as the sea turtles, and how best we can protect them for future generations.





The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

The clinic

The clinic is where all turtles are treated by the veterinarian. The surgery is equipped with all medical facilities required to treat the entangled turtles. Turtles may have an x-ray or ultrasound taken, undergo surgery under general anaesthesia, receive rehydration therapy, feeding therapy and wound management. If any turtles require overnight dry docking, there are red lamps to enable us to supervise the turtles throughout the night.

The office

The office is located by the tanks in the main centre. The vet will be found here when not in surgery. Morning meetings will begin here daily at 9am; a board in the office will have the daily routines required to be carried out by volunteers. Tutorials and presentations will also take place here on a weekly basis in the evening.

The holding tanks

There are 3 tanks in the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre. The first is divided in to small shallow tanks and this is where triage takes place for each turtle. We do a full physical exam in these tanks before moving the turtle to the operation room. The turtles also recover from any operations here.

The medium sized tank consists of four individual tanks. These tanks are used when the turtle is sufficiently recovered from anaesthesia, but still requires medication and specific observation.

Once deemed fit enough, the turtle is moved to a much larger tank where it can regain strength. When the turtle is strong enough and displaying normal behaviour, namely foraging and sleeping on the bottom of the tank, it can be released from this tank back into the wild. The turtle should also be able dive easily and should spend the large proportion of its time under water. Releasing a turtle is an exciting and gratifying experience, one that is shared with hotel guests. Usually we use a dhoni (boat) and take the turtle to the drop-off (where the atoll drops to the deep open sea, about half an hour from the island); this gives the turtle the best chance to get back on its journey.



What will you get up to at the centre?

- Assist staff with all aspects of turtle rescue and rehabilitation.
This may include, but is not limited to: working up medications and fluids, treating wounds, helping with routine medical exams, and observing surgeries
- Maintenance of sea turtle patients including daily health checks, diet preparation, and feeding (including environment enrichment)
- General maintenance of the centre, holding tanks, and centre equipment
- Help with data collection on field trips to surrounding reefs and neighbouring islands, including but not limited to: photos for the photo-id program, measurements of foraging turtles, sightings information and taking ghost net measurements
- Contribute to our social media channels
- Assisting with educational tours of the centre for resort guests
- Education outreach - local school visits and school tours of the centre
- Night time patrols for nesting turtles and potential nest relocation
- Post-hatching analysis of sea turtle nests (hatching rate, egg count, etc)
- Complete a presentation at the end of the experience about an aspect of turtle care, as chosen by the veterinarian

Tutorials you will receive:

- 1) The Olive Ridley Project – Mission, objectives, marine conservation in the Maldives
- 2) Sea turtle physiology and anatomy, histology and parasites
- 3) Common diseases and injuries of sea turtles
- 4) Turtle pharmacology - how treating reptiles can be challenging

Practical skills you will develop:

You will develop many skills during your time at the centre and here are just a few!

- 1) Identification and handling of sea turtles: adequately maintain their rehabilitation tanks as well as the twice daily feeding routine of the patients
- 2) Health check and wound care tutorials: daily check-ups of the patients involve assessing their injuries and wounds post-surgery. The turtles will also be weighed weekly to monitor their health
- 3) Veterinary clinical care: assisting the vet with giving daily medications, such as injections and wound therapy kit
- 4) Working in the field on a small island with an unpredictable climate

Cost of Volunteering at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

In order to sustain the running of the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, we ask for a donation to cover your expenses and the operation of the rescue centre. The breakdown of the donation is as below:

2 Weeks: £1,295

3 Weeks: £1,700

4 Weeks: £1,940

Your donation will cover return domestic flights from Malé to the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, two ORP t-shirt 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 accommodation in Malé - should you require.

What are you funding

Operational Costs

Your donation will help maintain the rescue centre and ensure that all sea turtles have the best possible care and treatment during rehabilitation. We pride ourselves on providing the best medicine and equipment available to treat injured turtles in the Maldives and we thank all our volunteers for their kind donations to make this rescue centre possible.

Domestic Flight:

Return domestic flights are included in your donation. The rescue centre is situated in Baa Atoll and a flight is necessary to get to the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre. Views are incredible so keep your camera ready!

Charitable Objectives:

A small part of your donation will be used to fund our core charitable objectives, such as expanding our rescue and rehabilitation efforts and further our understanding of sea turtle veterinary care; broaden our research into sea turtles and their conservation; grow our education and outreach programmes; and protect sea turtles and their habitats all over the world.



Capacity Building:

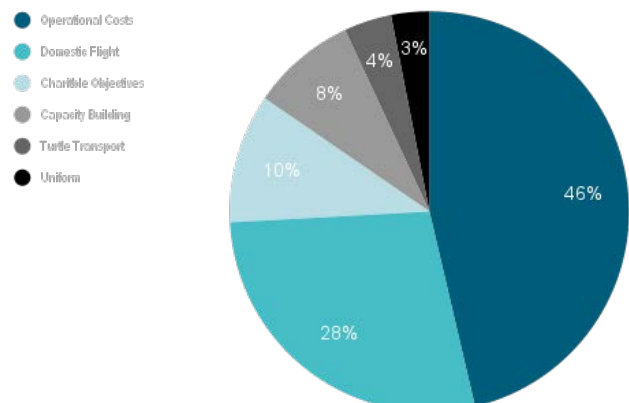
Despite national laws protecting sea turtles in the Maldives, poaching for meat and eggs continue to be a threat to these animals. In addition, keeping hatchling as pets is often observed in many local islands. Your donation will help the rescue centre employ passionate Maldivian interns who will hopefully pass their gained knowledge and passion to others in the country.

Turtle Transport

Your donation will help cover fuel costs for transporting injured sea turtles to the rescue centre.

Uniform

Two ORP t-shirts made from recycled plastic bottles and organic cotton.





FAQ

Is there a minimum qualification to volunteer at the rescue centre?

Absolutely not! This opportunity is open to anybody who would like to experience sea turtle conservation first hand. However, we do ask that volunteers speak fluent English, are 18+, able swimmers and have a passion for sea turtles. This volunteering program ideally suits those wanting to learn more about sea turtle medicine and first aid and experience what it takes to work with these charismatic animals in the wild.

How many volunteers at a time?

We have the capacity to host 3 volunteers at the same time at the rescue centre.

How many hours will be spent at the rescue centre?

Work at the rescue centre is generally between 9am – 5pm. Depending on the circumstances, these timings might change. For an example, there might be night shifts for nesting surveys or if a turtle has undergone surgery volunteers will be involved in taking shifts to monitor the conditions of the turtle. You will have one day off per week and will be free to fill your time however you would like within reason.

Will I be getting any training to provide care for the turtles at the Centre?

Yes, you will be going through both theoretical and practical training sessions with our vet. Most of your work will be very hands on.

What will the accommodation be like?

You will be in a single sex shared room, with en suite facilities. Bed linen and towels will be provided.

What is the food like?

All volunteers will be eating with the veterinarian. Breakfast and dinner will be eaten in the staff area behind the guest restaurant and the food is the guest buffet. At lunch the team will eat in the staff canteen, this food is predominately local, however there is pasta and salad option too.

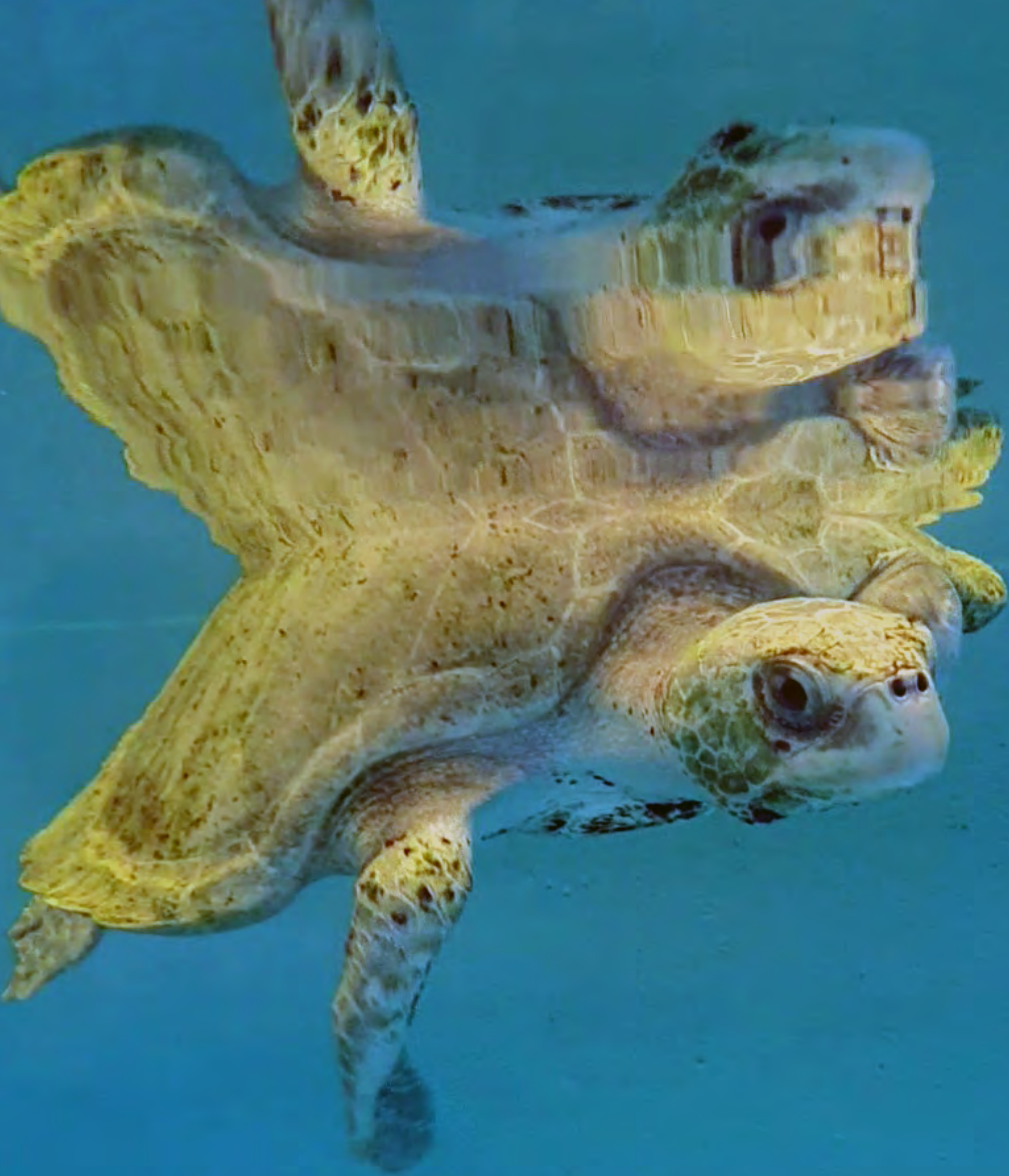
Do I need any local currency?

Whilst staying on the island very little cash is required. US dollars are accepted and so there is no need to exchange money to Maldivian rufiyaa. You can use US dollars in the staff shop for cool drinks and ice cream.

What is there to do when not working?

During your down time you will have access to the staff beach area. You may snorkel off the house reef, and have access (at an additional charge) to the watersports and diving facilities.

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



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READ MORE ABOUT US

oliveridleyproject.org

