

# Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

Volunteer Information



OLIVE RIDLEY  
PROJECT



**COCO PALM**  
dhuni kolhu · maldives

# Dear Volunteer,

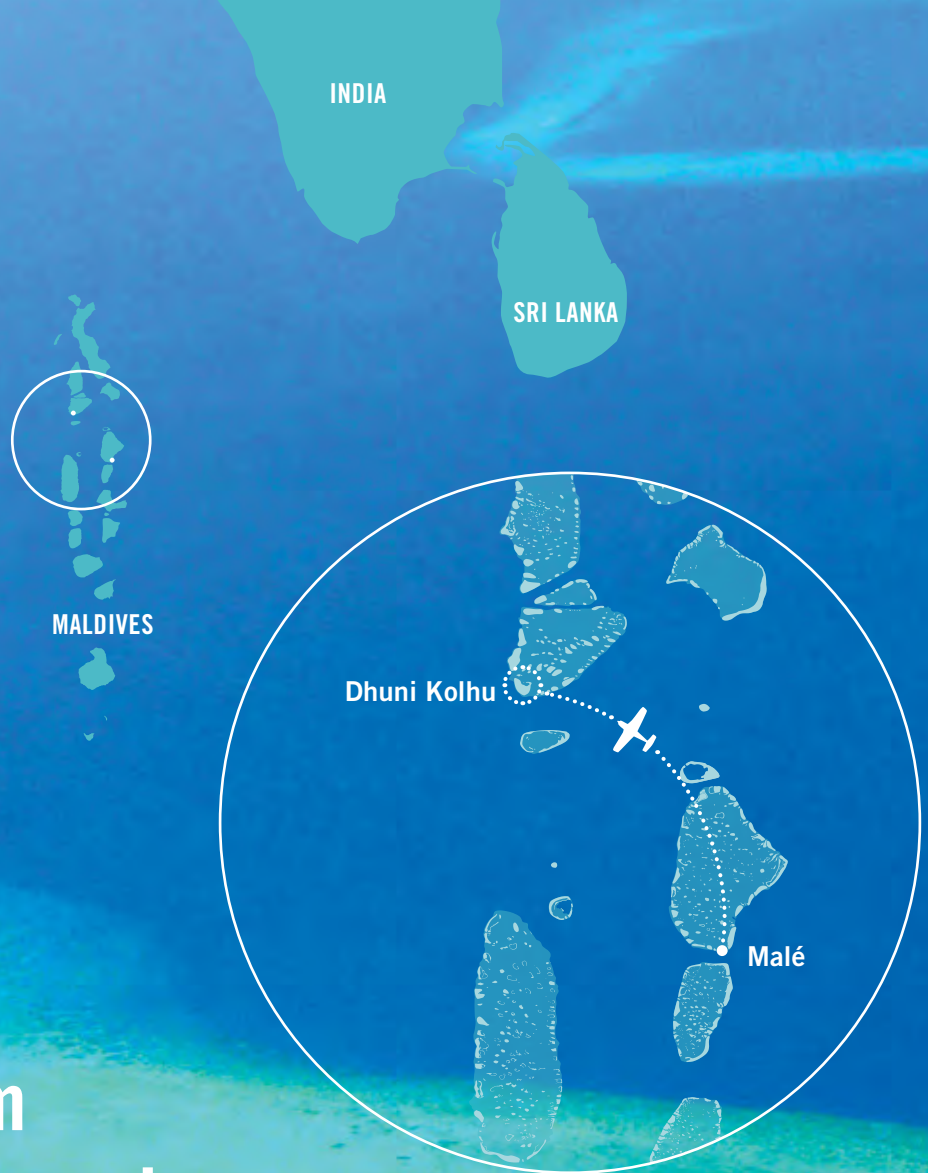
Thank you for your interest in the Marine Turtle  
Rescue Centre in the Maldives.

The volunteers contribute to the daily running of our rescue centre and therefore play a very important role in our ability to care for our patients. As a volunteer, you will support our veterinary team, consisting of a resident veterinary surgeon, a registered veterinary nurse, and a full-time assistant, in rescuing and treating injured sea turtles found in Maldivian waters. Together, we strive to ensure their safe return 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](mailto: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 over 500,000 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 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 harbour 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 veterinary team. Through a capacity building program we also work with Maldivian nationals who assist with the daily operations of the centre. The centre is located at 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 2 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 has three main charitable objectives:

**1** To promote humane behavior towards sea turtles by providing appropriate care, protection, treatment and security for animals which need care and attention by reason of sickness, maltreatment, poor circumstances or ill usage and to educate the public and veterinarian community in matters pertaining to sea turtle welfare in general and the prevention of cruelty and suffering to sea turtles.

**3** To advance the education of the scientific community by filling scientific data gaps in sea turtle research..

*N.B. Although ORP strives to achieve all three objectives you will be predominantly working towards charitable objective 1.*

**2** To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of sea turtles, by provision of talks, workshops, online courses and training.







© Mohammed Solah

## THE PROBLEM

---

In the last twelve years, over 1,100 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. In addition, 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

---

We conduct several scientific research projects, many of which you can contribute to:

### Ghost gear encounters & entanglement incidents

Our first initiative is a citizen science project that relies upon individuals who encounter ghost gear while snorkelling or walking on local beaches. Details of the net and the presence of any entangled turtles are recorded and fed into our central database on ghost gear and turtle entanglements in the Indian Ocean.

### Sea turtle photo-ID of foraging and nesting turtles.

We have a database of over 30,500 sightings of 5,500+ identified sea turtles and we collaborate with marine biologists, dive professionals and tourists all over the Maldives. The goal of this project is to distinguish residency patterns, determine population trends and recognize environmental “hot spots” that could warrant additional legislative protection. ORP, in association with the International Sea Turtle Symposium, helped develop “The Internet of Turtles” - a ground-breaking photo-ID software and an open source platform, for monitoring and analysing sea turtle populations around the world and also helped organise photo-ID workshops. Participating members are trained in sea turtle observation, photo-id and contributing data. Those who are able to witness sea turtle nesting or a nest hatching can also support the team in collecting vital data from each event.

Analysis of this data helps develop Red List assessments for the Maldives, impact reports for the Marine Turtle Specialist Group Regional Reports, technical reports for the United Nations and peer reviewed papers in scientific journals.





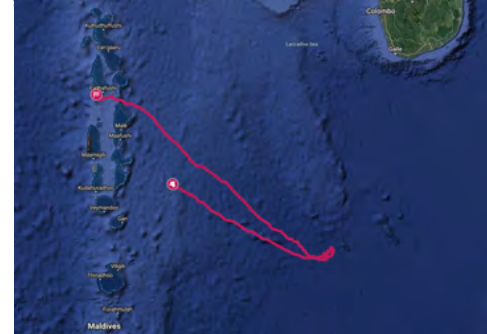
## Satellite tagging of released turtle patients

Since 2017, we have released almost 100 rehabilitated sea turtles from our rescue and rehabilitation centres in the Maldives, most of which were olive ridleys. Olive ridleys, unlike the commonly seen green and hawksbill turtles, spend most of their life in the open ocean. Therefore, we know surprisingly little about them!

To better understand the movement and foraging habits of our rehabilitated turtle patients, we have initiated ORPTrack - a satellite tagging program that will allow us to track turtles for up to a year. The data gathered from these satellite tags will be consistently monitored, recorded and analysed. While at the centre, you may have a chance to assist the team deploying a satellite tag and releasing the respective turtle patient.

## Epibionts & parasites

Our turtle patients are sometimes carrying other animals, so called epibionts, on their shell when they come to us. To document and understand the pattern of different species such as barnacles and leeches associated with turtles found in the Maldives, we are collecting samples from our patients upon intake. Under the guidance of our veterinary team, you have the chance to learn about these epibionts and support our collection efforts.







## 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, endoscopy or ultrasound taken, undergo surgery under general anaesthesia, receive re-hydration 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 holding tanks

---

There are 3 tanks in the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre. The first is divided into 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 back into the wild. The turtle should also be able to dive easily and should spend a 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.

## Operating Hours

---

The centre is open to visitors daily from 09:00 to 12:30 and 14:00 to 17:00

Turtle patient feeding takes place at 10:30 and 16:00 every day.

Resort guests are welcome to visit the centre at any time during operating hours. We also regularly welcome school children for educational visits.







## What will you get up to at the centre?

---

- Assist the veterinary team with all aspects of turtle rescue and rehabilitation. This may include, but is not limited to: preparing medications and fluids, treating wounds, helping with routine medical exams, observing surgeries, and assisting in providing enrichment to the turtles and documenting behavioural observations
- Maintenance of sea turtle patients including daily health checks, diet preparation, feeding, and environment enrichment
- General maintenance of the centre, holding tanks, and other 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: accurately identify different turtle species, ensure daily feeding routine of patients and maintain their rehabilitation tanks
- 2) Health check and wound care: 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 with giving daily medications, such as injections and wound therapy
- 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: £1,385

3 Weeks: £1,820

4 Weeks: £2,075

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 it.

## What are you funding

### Operational Costs

Your donation will help maintain the rescue centre and ensure that all sea turtles have the best possible treatment during rehabilitation. We pride ourselves on providing the best medical care 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 function.

### Domestic Flights:

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:

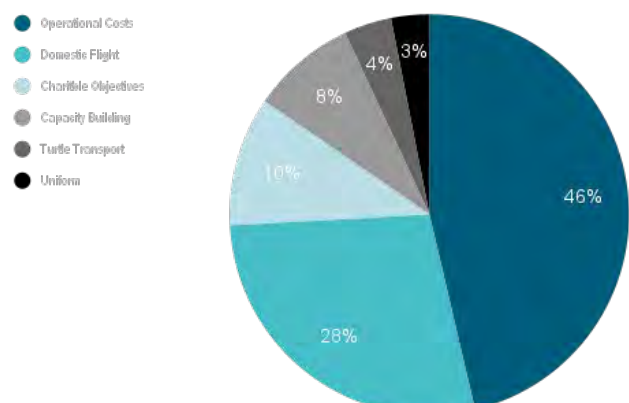
Despite national laws protecting sea turtles in the Maldives, poaching for meat and eggs continue to be a threat to these animals. In addition, keeping hatchling as pets is often observed in many local islands. Your donation will help the rescue centre employ passionate Maldivian assistants who will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







## 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 programme 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 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 veterinary team. 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 veterinary team. Breakfast and dinner are served in the staff area behind the guest restaurant with food from the guest buffet. At lunch the team will eat in the staff restaurant. This food is predominately Asian, however there are pasta and salad options 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](mailto:volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org)*





**OLIVE RIDLEY**  
**PROJECT**

READ MORE ABOUT US

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

