



Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

Volunteer Information



OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT



COCO PALM
dhuni kolhu · maldives

Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with ORP at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in the Maldives!

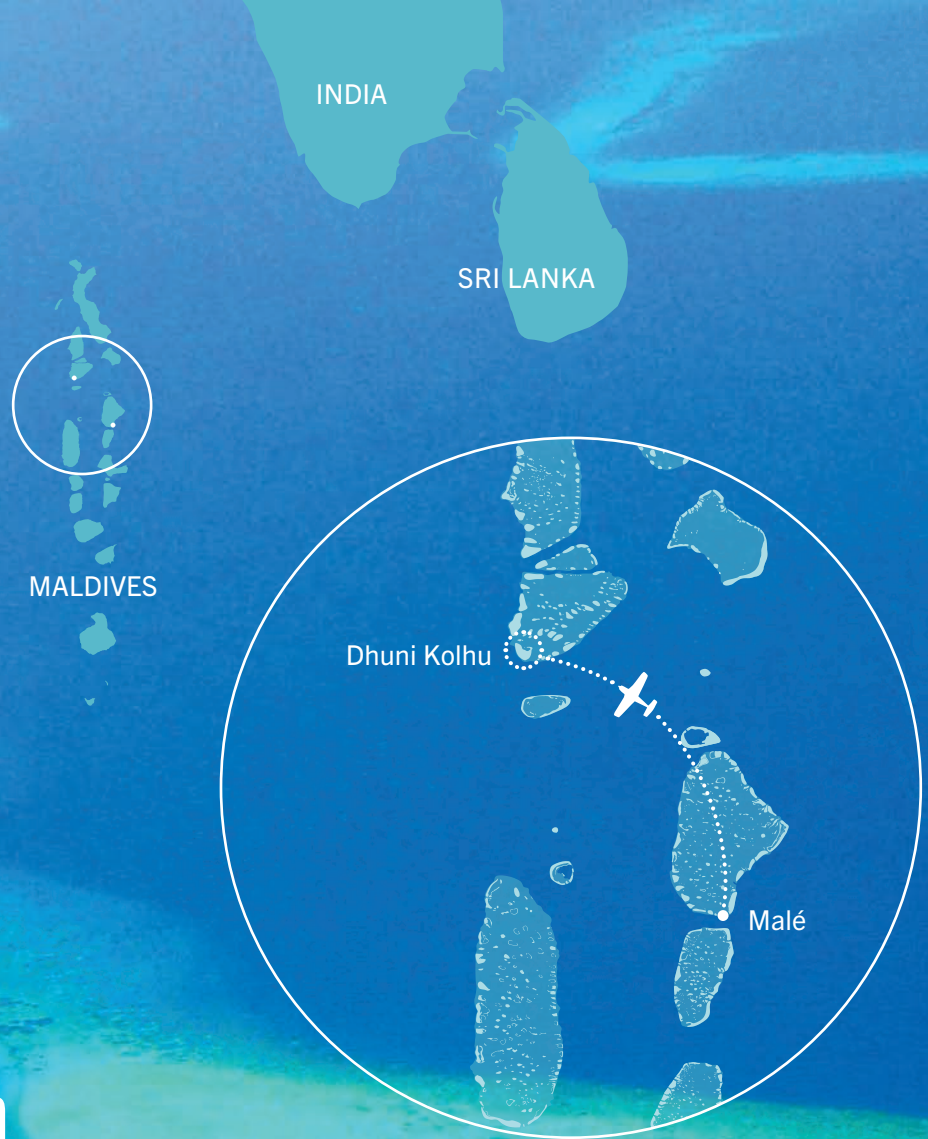
Our volunteers play a very important role in the daily running of the Rescue Centre and therefore contribute significantly to our ability to care for our sea turtle patients. As a volunteer, you will support our veterinary team – consisting of a lead veterinary surgeon, a veterinary surgeon, a registered veterinary nurse, and an intern – in treating injured and sick sea turtles rescued in Maldivian waters. Together, we strive to return them to health and ensure their safe release to the wild.

This is truly a unique opportunity to experience what it takes to provide wildlife conservation medicine in a remote location. The Rescue Centre is one of the most advanced sea turtle medical facilities in the world, and is a regional and global resource for clinical innovations, sea turtle health research and veterinary training. It is also the only such facility in the world that treats mainly olive ridley turtles.

This guide will give you a better understanding of your time volunteering with us. Please feel free to email us at volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org with any further questions.



**OLIVE RIDLEY
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The Maldives and Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu Resort

The Republic of Maldives is an island nation situated in the Indian Ocean. It comprises 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, Dhuni Kolhu, is located in Baa Atoll, a thirty minute seaplane ride north of Malé. Baa Atoll consists of 75 islands of which 13 are inhabited and just under 20 are currently operated as 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.

The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre is located at Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu Resort in Baa Atoll. The island of Dhuni Kolhu is roughly 900m by 300m in a crescent moon shape. The resort is owned by Coco Collection Resorts, a Maldivian hospitality company. We are very fortunate to be located here, and Coco Collection plays a very important role in the conservation of sea turtles by hosting our medical facility, staff, and volunteers.

About the Olive Ridley Project



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The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) was established in 2013, and is a registered charity in England & Wales (Reg. No. 1165905) and the Maldives (Reg. No. CR/04/2022).

ORP has three main charitable objectives:

- 1 To promote humane behaviour 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.
- 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.
- 3 To advance the education of the scientific community by filling scientific data gaps in sea turtle research.





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The Problem

Sea turtles have existed on Earth for over 120 million years and play a vital role in ensuring the health of our oceans. Oceans play a critical role in sustaining human life by regulating the Earth's climate and providing essential resources such as food, freshwater, and oxygen. Therefore, preserving and protecting our oceans is crucial for the survival of our species. If sea turtles become extinct, the whole marine ecosystem — the planet's largest — will weaken; To protect our oceans and ourselves, we need to protect sea turtles.

Unfortunately, sea turtles face many threats to their survival including: entanglement in marine debris, illegal take, bycatch, and destruction of feeding and nesting habitats. As a result, six of the remaining seven species of sea turtles are classified as threatened with extinction by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Bycatch and habitat loss are perhaps the biggest threats to sea turtles globally. In the Maldives, fishing happens mostly by pole and line, so bycatch is not a major problem. Despite this, over 1,200 sea turtles entangled in ghost gear (abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear) have been reported in the Maldives since 2011.

The majority of these entangled sea turtles were olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*); however, green (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) have also been reported. It was the many entangled olive ridley sea turtles that inspired the founding of ORP.

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) opened the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in February 2017 with a mission to provide the best medical treatment possible to all injured and sick sea turtles found in the Maldives. We have since grown into an international centre for sea turtle medical innovation, research and training. In addition to the Rescue Centre, we also operate a sea turtle rehabilitation centre in North Malé Atoll and have two more under construction.

Our Research Projects

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

Ghost Gear Encounters & Entanglement Incidents

Our ghost gear research is a citizen science project that relies upon individuals who encounter ghost gear in the water and on beaches. Details of the net and any entangled sea turtles are recorded and fed into our central database on ghost gear and sea turtle entanglements in the Indian Ocean.

The aim of this research is to understand the origin of ghost gear, its drift patterns, and where it intersects with sea turtles, to mitigate the issue. Whilst volunteering with us, you may help us with analysis and data entry when ghost nets are brought to the centre.

Sea Turtle Photo-Id Of Foraging And Nesting Turtles

We have one of the largest databases of sea turtle sightings and identified sea turtles in the world! We collaborate with marine biologists, dive professionals and tourists all over the Maldives to collect data.

The goal of this project is to establish a sea turtle population baseline which will allow us to determine population trends and recognize “hot spots” that could warrant additional legislative protection. We also collect sea turtle nesting and hatching data.

Analysis of our data has so far been used to develop the first sea turtle Red List Assessments for the Maldives and in impact reports for the Marine Turtle Specialist Group Regional Reports, technical reports for the United Nations, and peer reviewed papers in scientific journals.

If you go diving or snorkelling in your free time and are lucky enough to photograph sea turtles, you may submit the photos to us to contribute to this research.



Epibionts & Parasites

Our sea 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 sea 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.

Satellite Tagging Of Released Turtle Patients

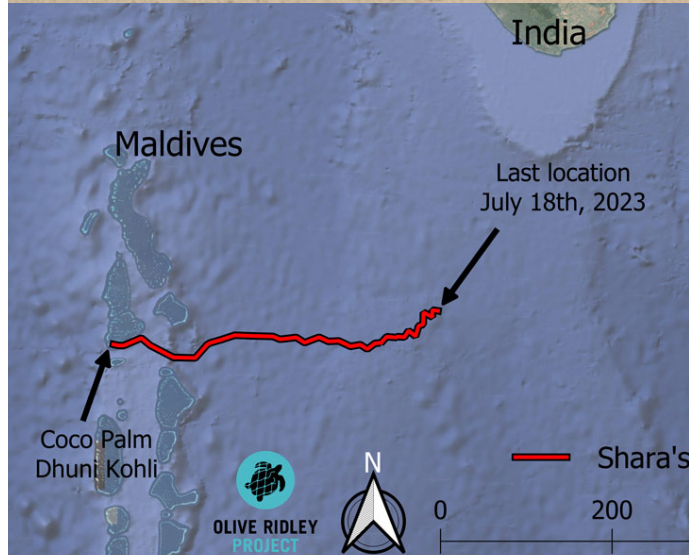
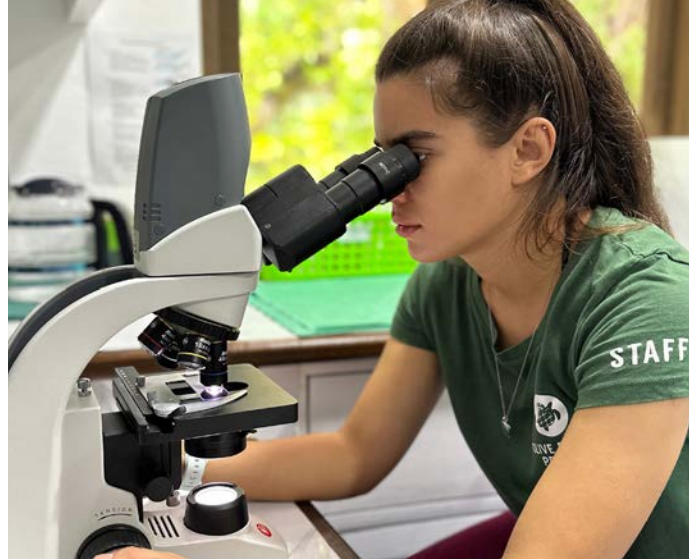
Since 2017, we have released more than 130 rehabilitated sea turtles from our rescue and rehabilitation centres in the Maldives, most of which were olive ridleys. Olive ridleys, unlike the commonly seen green and hawksbill turtles, spend most of their life in the open ocean. Therefore, we know surprisingly 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 our released patients for up to a year. The data gathered from these satellite tags is consistently monitored, recorded and analysed. While volunteering, you may have a chance to assist the team deploying a satellite tag and releasing the respective turtle patient.

Advancing Sea Turtle Health Through Medical Research

Central to our mission is to treat and restore our sea turtle patients to good health so that they can be released back to the wild. Our veterinary team is at the forefront of advancing novel clinical therapies to accomplish this, often translating treatments and techniques from human medicine to our sea turtle patients. To help facilitate this mission, we have established ORPHealth, the first sea turtle health database in the region, which will allow us to refine patient therapies and track marine ecosystem health over time.

Our clinical research interests also include emerging and alternative wound healing and limb salvaging therapies, regenerative medicine, microbiome studies and sea turtle behaviour and welfare. As a volunteer, you will be able to observe sample collection, new therapies and have the opportunity to be trained in husbandry techniques for patients undergoing these studies.



Community-Based Education

We believe we can achieve sustainable and positive change only if the local communities which are affected are part of the solution.

Education is an integral part of our multifaceted approach to protecting sea turtles and their habitats. We believe that education is a powerful tool for fostering curiosity, increasing awareness, engaging people – particularly young people – and encouraging action at the local, national, and global levels.

Our educational initiatives are tailored to meet the needs of all our audiences, both at our field sites and across our digital platforms. We conduct various in-person educational and interactive workshops, talks, and festivals on a broad range of topics, from sea turtle biology to conservation. Additionally, we host and attend webinars and have a vast repository of sea turtle educational resources on our website – including free courses.

We also offer paid internship programmes to Maldivian nationals at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre and in the field of sea turtle research to build local capacity for sea turtle rehabilitation, research and conservation. At the Rescue Centre, the interns learn about sea turtle care and husbandry and the wider field of ocean conservation, experience and learn about veterinary medicine and husbandry, and assist the veterinary team with treating turtle patients and the running of the centre. Several of our previous interns have gone on to work with ORP or other conservation organisations - and even the Environmental Protection Agency – championing the cause of sea turtle conservation.

The Rescue Centre regularly hosts educational visits for local schools and community organisations. Our veterinary team give them a full tour and an introduction to our current patients and the work we do at the Rescue Centre. The visitors also get to observe patient feeding and try mock-up X-rays, as well as checking blood smears under the microscope.

ORP also works with the Ministry of Education to bring marine science into classrooms nationwide.





The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre

The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre is one of the most unique sea turtle medical facilities in the world where the majority of the patients are olive ridley turtles.

The Clinic

The clinic is where all patients are treated. It is also the most advanced sea turtle medical facility in the Maldives and functions as a teaching resource. It is comprehensively equipped with;

- a full blood laboratory
- radiography
- endoscopy
- ultrasonography
- Class 4 laser
- full surgical suite

We are able to triage and treat any injury or condition faced by sea turtles in Maldivian waters and serve as an expert resource for other rescue centres in the country and region.

The daily running of the Rescue Centre is carried out by a veterinary team which includes a veterinary surgeon and a veterinary nurse, an intern, and a team of one to three volunteers. We also have seasonal visiting veterinarians to help take care of our patients.

The Patient Tanks

There are seven patient tanks at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre. These tanks can be considered analogous to a patient bed in a human hospital, where our patients spend most of their time while under our care. The patient tanks are divided into staging areas based on the specific condition or procedure being performed. This includes smaller tanks for critical patients requiring more specialised care and observation to larger tanks for patients nearing release to the wild.

Releasing Rehabilitated Patients

Releasing a patient is an exciting and gratifying experience for our entire veterinary team, one that we happily share with resort guests and staff, as well as our social media audience. We will typically release our patients from the beach, to give them the least stressful and best chance at success on their return to the wild.

We cannot guarantee that a patient will be released during your time at the Rescue Centre; patients are released as soon as they have been medically cleared to minimise their time in captivity.

Operating Hours

The Rescue Centre is open to visitors daily from 09:00 to 12:30 and 14:00 to 17:00. Turtle patient feeding takes place twice a day. Resort guests are welcome to visit at any time during operating hours. We also regularly welcome school children and others for educational visits.

How will you be helping at the centre?

During your time as a volunteer, you will be assisting the veterinary team with many aspects of sea turtle rehabilitation and husbandry, as well as the running of the Rescue Centre and educational outreach activities. These may include observing surgeries and other clinical procedures and satellite tag deployment, as well as assisting with:

- daily health checks
- diet preparation and feeding
- providing enrichment to turtle patients
- documenting behavioural observations
- general maintenance of the Rescue Centre, patient tanks, and other equipment
- guiding tours of the Rescue Centre for resort guests and other visitors
- data collection
- making ghost net bracelets
- releasing rehabilitated patients

Tutorials you will receive:

- 1) Olive Ridley Project – history, mission, and impact
- 2) Introduction to sea turtle husbandry and rehabilitation
- 3) Sea turtle nesting & excavation

Practical experiences you will participate in:

You will have the opportunity to participate in many practical experiences during your time with us, including:

- Learning to accurately identify different sea turtle species
- Training in proper sea turtle handling techniques
- Building skills in identifying health and treatment progression through direct sea turtle patient behavioural observations
- Observing veterinary procedures including wound management, administration of medications by veterinary staff, and sea turtle nursing techniques
- Working with a passionate team in a remote island location and an unpredictable environment



Please note: All activities are subject to change due to the medical needs of our sea turtle patients, staff and visitor safety, seasons, and weather conditions. Sea turtles are wild animals and we cannot guarantee that a release or satellite tag deployment will happen during your time as a volunteer.

We keep physical contact with our turtle patients at a minimum since it causes them stress; do not expect to be constantly interacting with the patients as this is a busy medical facility.

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:

4 Weeks: £2,775

2 Weeks: £1,595

Your donation will cover return domestic flights from Malé to the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, ORP T-shirts, as well as three meals per day and shared 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 turtle patients have the best possible treatment while under our care. We pride ourselves on providing the best medical therapy and equipment available to treat injured and diseased sea turtles in the Maldives and we thank all our volunteers for their kind donations to help our Rescue Centre function so well.

Capacity Building:

One of ORP's main goals is to build local capacity to care for injured sea turtles and conduct sea turtle conservation. Your donation will help us offer internship opportunities to Maldivians passionate about protecting sea turtles.

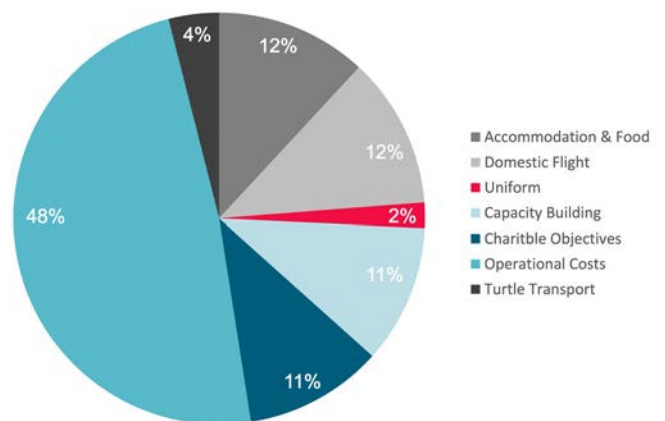
Several of our past interns now work for ORP in various capacities or have gone on to work for other conservation organisations – and even the Environmental Protection Agency – championing the cause of sea turtles.

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 therapeutics and 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.

Turtle Transport

Transporting injured sea turtles between atolls and islands can be challenging – and sometimes it can take a whole village! Thanks to support from many resorts and local islands, we can coordinate speedy transport to the Rescue Centre. In addition, Trans Maldivian Airlines (TMA) kindly flies our turtle patients to us by seaplane. However, sometimes sea turtles are rescued outside of our fantastic support network. Your donation will help cover costs for transporting injured sea turtles to the Rescue Centre by domestic flight, speed boat or other transport options.



Accommodation & Meals

You will be provided with shared accommodation and three meals per day for the duration of your stay.

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 there. The views are incredible so keep your camera ready!



FAQ

Is there a minimum qualification or fitness level required to volunteer at the Rescue Centre?

This opportunity is open to anybody who would like to experience sea turtle conservation medicine first hand. However, we do require our volunteers to be:

- 18 years or older
- physically fit
- willing and able to do sustained physical labour, including heavy lifting
- capable swimmer
- competent in English
- willing to work as part of a team

This is a highly rewarding, but very physically demanding volunteer opportunity. You will be doing strenuous work in a hot and humid environment where daytime temperatures regularly exceed 32C/90F and insects are common.

How many volunteers are there at a time?

We have the capacity to host 3 volunteers at the same time. We may also have a visiting veterinary surgeon with us.

How many hours will be spent at the Rescue Centre?

The Rescue Centre is normally open from 9am – 5pm. The timings might change depending on the needs of our patients.

You will be working six days per week and will be free to fill your down-time however you would like within reason.

What are the accommodations like?

You will be sharing ensuite, air-conditioned accommodations with up to two other volunteers. Clean bed linen and towels will be provided weekly.

What is the food like?

Breakfast and dinner are served in the staff area with food from the guest buffet. At lunch, the team will eat in the staff cafeteria. The food there is predominantly Asian; however there are pasta and salad options as well. Please let us know in advance if you have any dietary requirements.

Food and beverages can also be enjoyed at additional cost in the resort bars.

What is there to do when not working?

During your free time you will have access to the staff beach area and you may snorkel around the island. You can also enjoy water sports and diving at an additional charge. The resort often hosts cultural events and entertainment in the evening.

Hopefully we've answered most of your questions here, however if you would like some more information, please feel free to email us at volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org



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READ MORE ABOUT US

oliveridleyproject.org

