

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!

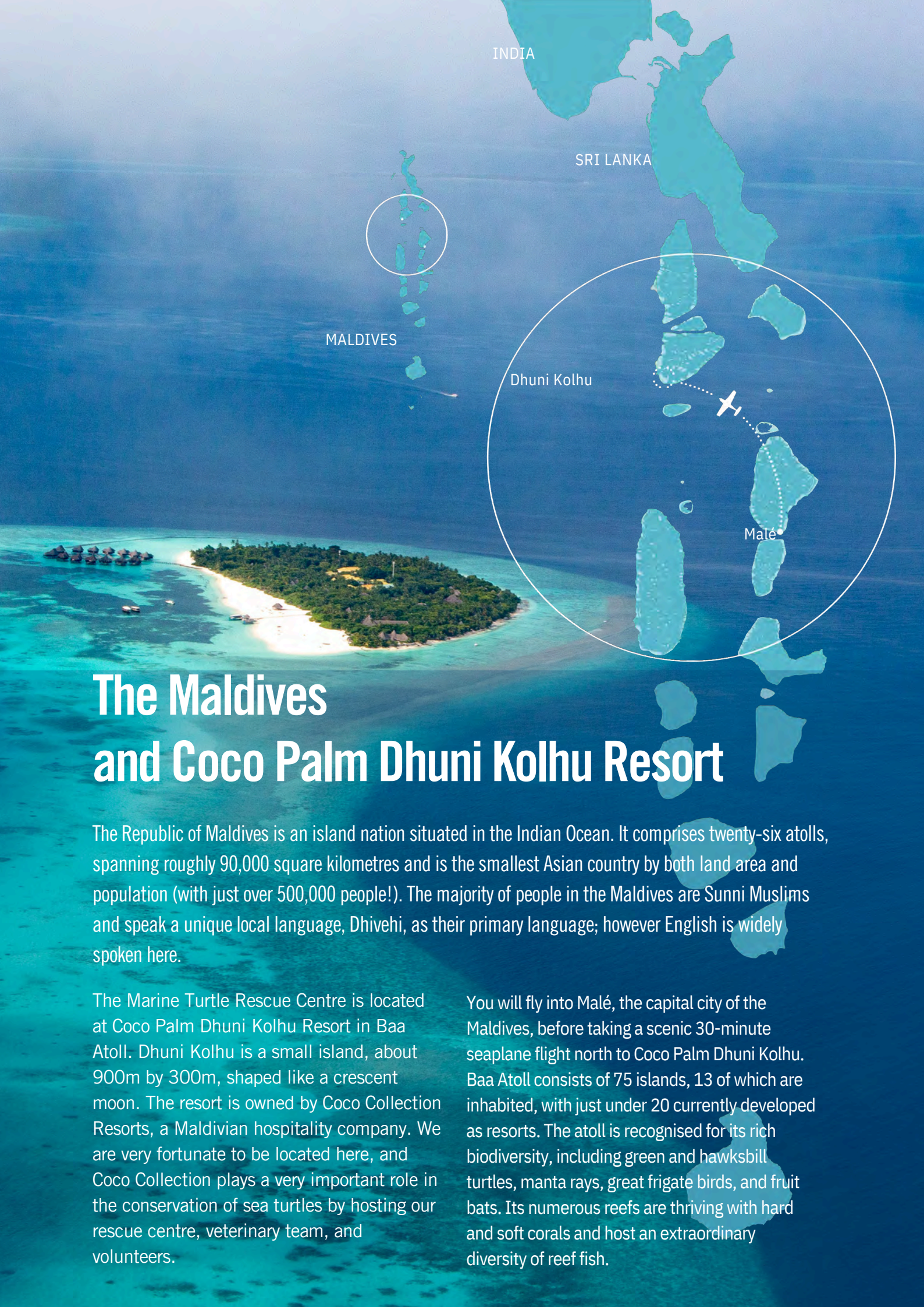
Our volunteers play a very important role in the daily running of the Rescue Centre and contribute significantly to our ability to care for our turtle patients. As a volunteer, you will support our veterinary team in treating injured and sick sea turtles rescued in Maldivian waters. Together, we strive 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.

All ORP research and clinical activities are conducted under permits issued by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Maldives.





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.

The Marine Turtle Rescue Centre is located at Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu Resort in Baa Atoll. Dhuni Kolhu is a small island, about 900m by 300m, shaped like a crescent moon. 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 rescue centre, veterinary team, and volunteers.

You will fly into Malé, the capital city of the Maldives, before taking a scenic 30-minute seaplane flight north to Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu. Baa Atoll consists of 75 islands, 13 of which are inhabited, with just under 20 currently developed as resorts. The atoll is recognised for its rich biodiversity, including green and hawksbill turtles, manta rays, great frigate birds, and fruit bats. Its numerous reefs are thriving with hard and soft corals and host an extraordinary diversity of reef fish.

About Olive Ridley Project

Olive Ridley Project (ORP) was established in 2013, and is a registered charity in England & Wales (1165905), the Maldives (CR/04/2022), and Kenya (NGO-EPFPJ6).



**OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT**

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.





© Mohamed Solah

The problem

Sea turtles have existed on Earth for over 120 million years and play a vital role in maintaining the health of our oceans. Oceans are essential to sustaining human life, as they regulate the Earth's climate and provide critical 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 entire marine ecosystem – the planet's largest – will be weakened. To protect our oceans, and ultimately ourselves, we must protect sea turtles.

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

Globally, bycatch and habitat loss are perhaps the greatest threats to sea turtles. In the Maldives, however, fishing is primarily done by pole and line, so bycatch is not a major concern. Nevertheless, since 2011, more than 1,250 sea turtles have been reported entangled in ghost gear (abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing equipment) in the Maldives.

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

The ORP Marine Turtle Rescue Centre opened in February 2017 with a mission to provide the best medical treatment possible to all injured and sick sea turtles found in the Maldives. Since then, we have grown into an international hub for sea turtle medical innovation, research, and training. Alongside the Rescue Centre, we also operate two sea turtle rehabilitation centres in North Malé, and Raa atolls.

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 on individuals encountering ghost gear in the water or on beaches. Details of the nets and any entangled sea turtles are recorded and entered into our central database on ghost gear and sea turtle entanglements in the Indian Ocean.

The aim of this research is to understand the origins of ghost gear, its drift patterns, and where it intersects with sea turtles, in order to mitigate the issue. While volunteering with us, you may assist 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 recognise “hot spots” that could warrant additional legislative protection. We also collect sea turtle nesting and hatching data.

Our data analysis has been instrumental in developing the first sea turtle Red List Assessments for the Maldives and has contributed to 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 fortunate enough to photograph sea turtles, you can submit the photos to us to support this research.



Epibionts & parasites

Sometimes, our turtle patients carry other animals, known as epibionts, on their shells. To document and understand the patterns of various species, such as barnacles and leeches, associated with sea turtles in the Maldives, we collect samples from our patients upon intake. Under the guidance of our veterinary team, you may have the opportunity to assist with our sample collection efforts.

Satellite tagging of released turtle patients

Olive ridleys spend most of their lives in the open ocean, so we know surprisingly little about them! To better understand the movements and foraging habits of our rehabilitated sea turtle patients, we initiated ORPTrack, a satellite tagging programme that allows us to track released turtles for up to a year. The data gathered from these satellite tags is continuously monitored, recorded, and analysed. While volunteering, you may have a chance to assist in deploying a satellite tag and releasing the tagged turtle patient.

Conservation medicine research

Our veterinary team is actively involved in several clinical research projects that advance our conservation medicine mission. We recently established the Sea Turtle Health Database, which makes up among the largest continuous collection of clinical indices of sea turtle health in the world.

We are also the primary clinical site for the prestigious Morris Animal Foundation funded Sea Turtle Microbiome Study, which aims to characterise sea turtle gut microbiota and develop pre- and probiotic therapies for patients undergoing treatment at the Rescue Centre.

Our clinicians collaborate with academic institutions in Europe and the Middle East to advise graduate students in areas of sea turtle health that are our particular expertise: entanglement disorders, buoyancy syndrome, and osteomyelitis, a devastating bone disease. In this way, we learn from our patients, while teaching future researchers and clinicians and share our advances to the rest of the conservation medicine community.



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, raising awareness, engaging people – especially young people – and encouraging action at local, national, and global levels.

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 online 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 develop local capacity for sea turtle rehabilitation, research and conservation. At the Rescue Centre, the interns learn about sea turtle husbandry, veterinary medicine, and the wider field of ocean conservation. They 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 visitors from local schools and community organisations, offering them full tours and introductions to our patients and the work we do. We also collaborate with the Ministry of Education to bring marine science into classrooms across the nation.





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

Our clinic is the most advanced sea turtle medical facility in the Maldives. It also functions as a teaching resource and is comprehensively equipped with:

- 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 Rescue Centre is run by our veterinary team, which includes a veterinary surgeon and an associate veterinary surgeon, an intern, and a team of one to three volunteers. We also have seasonal veterinary trainees who come to learn conservation medicine.

The patient tanks

There are seven patient tanks at the Rescue Centre. These 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 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 and 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 and resort guests daily from 09:00 to 12:30 and 14:00 to 17:00. Patient feeding takes place once a day. 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:

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

Tutorials you will receive:

1. ORP – history, mission, and impact
2. An introduction to Maldives & Maldivian culture
3. Introduction to sea turtle husbandry and rehabilitation
4. Sea turtle species identification
5. 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:

- 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 and administration of medications by veterinary staff
- 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 sea 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 Rescue Centre

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

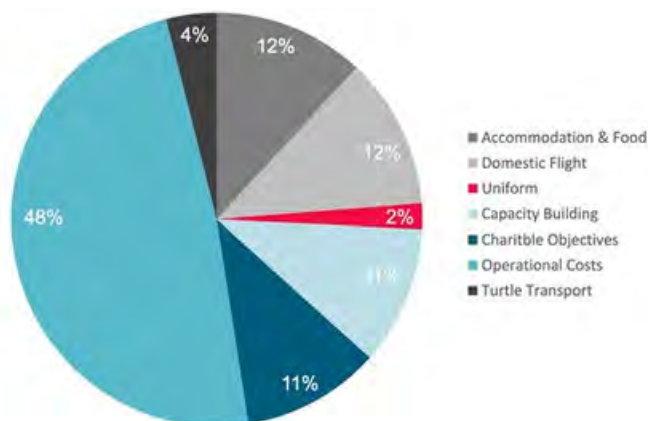
4 weeks: £2,775

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 you are funding



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.

Accommodation & Meals

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

Capacity development:

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

Sea 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 Airways (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.

Operational costs

Your donation will help run the Rescue Centre and ensure that all our patients get the best possible treatment 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.

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, 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.

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 (our patients can be large!)
- a 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 remote, sandy, hot, and humid environment where daytime temperatures regularly exceed 32C/90F and humidity levels hover around 80%. Insects are common.

How many volunteers are there at a time?

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

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.

How many hours will be spent at the Rescue Centre?

Your workday will typically last from 9am to 5:30pm. 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 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 SCUBA 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 more information, please feel free to email us at volunteer@oliveridleyproject.org



OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT



**OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT**

READ MORE ABOUT US

oliveridleyproject.org | [@oliveridleyproject](https://www.instagram.com/oliveridleyproject)

