



A guide to the :

# *Perhentian Islands Marine Project*





# The Perhentian Islands Marine Project

**Focus:** Marine Life

**Location:** Malaysia

**Start Dates:** Every Monday (Apr-Sep)

**Arrival & Starting Point:** Kota Bharu



Just 21 kilometres off the North East coast of Peninsular Malaysia in the South China Sea, lies the isle of Perhentian Kecil, where this unique conservation project is situated. There is very little knowledge regarding marine ecology in the area, yet the ecosystem here faces huge pressures from increasing tourism, climate change and so much more. As a result, the project aims to conduct the necessary research to understand the current state of the marine life such as turtles, sharks and corals which reside on their doorstep.

It is easy to say that this project is a spearhead in conservation efforts here; in recent years, they have been at the forefront of the first coral reef and seagrass mapping to be done in the marine park - which is where your dives will take place - and by now focusing their research efforts on shark and turtle ID, they have managed to get local businesses on board with adopting a more eco-friendly way of life and supporting the cause!

The information collected is passed on to local dive centres and the government to be able to make appropriate decisions regarding coastal zone management in the area, as well as to encourage responsible diving in tourists. This aspect has proven invaluable to the marine conservation efforts here, as research from the project shows that damage to the reefs from tourist impact is reduced by 60% after briefing!

By volunteering on this marine conservation project, you have the chance to complete a diving qualification, learn about marine life identification and survey techniques, and help to keep the reefs and beaches clean all whilst immersing yourself in island life!

This really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and you will walk away having expanded your knowledge on the threats the Perhentian ecosystem endures day after day, knowing you have made a true difference to its preservation.



## Scuba Diving Course

If you do not have any dive qualifications, you will complete your PADI Open Water qualification during your first week. If you are already qualified, you will be able to gain a PADI Advanced Open Water qualification or if you already have both, you can complete the Rescue Diver course. To be able to complete the Rescue Diver course, you must already have an Emergency First Response (EFR) qualification. If you do not, you are able to complete this first and then the Rescue Diver course in the same week but there is an additional cost for this.

If you are completing any dive course during your time on the project, you must volunteer for a minimum of two weeks. However, if you already have at least one qualification and do not wish to undertake another course, you can join the project for a minimum of one week.

## Shark ID

You may be lucky enough to encounter a range of shark species during your time on the project, including blacktip reef sharks, bamboo sharks, and even whale sharks! There is currently a real lack of ecological knowledge available for blacktip reef sharks in particular, but the information which is available reveals that their population is shrinking. The project aims to understand this more, so volunteers help to collect data on the sharks by photographing and identifying them, ultimately allowing for a greater understanding of the sharks' movements and composition within the Perhentian ecosystem. All the data collected will then help the project and local stakeholders to better understand the measures needed to help preserve the sharks.



## Turtle ID

As a major driving force for conservation efforts in the Perhentian Islands, the project has already begun efforts to collect data on the population of hawksbill and green turtles in the area. As with sharks, there is an unfortunate lack of ecological information available for both of these species, but data is able to be collected from snorkelling sites within the marine park. Therefore, you will spend time photographing and identifying turtles by diving deeper within the waters. All of the information collected from both the turtle and shark identification efforts will then be used in collaboration with local dive centres, as they increase their efforts to implement responsible tourism and diving practices in the area.





## Coral Nursery Maintenance

In previous years, one of the main focuses of the project was to map out and assess the health of coral reefs within the marine park. Due to the results of this research study, the team have now adjusted their focus to the deployment of coral nurseries within the park's reefs. Coral nurseries are PVC 'trees' which a healthy sample of coral is attached to. This will then grow and flourish, before eventually becoming permanently attached to the reef. During the period of growth, volunteers will help to maintain the nurseries, removing any algae or predators from the 'trees' and therefore removing any negative impacts to the coral's growth. An increased global rate of coral bleaching has made this activity all the more necessary, and it is hoped that by deploying more nurseries the coral reefs here will regenerate and aid marine conservation overall.



## Reef & Beach Cleans

During your time on the project, you will help to clear rubbish and debris from the beaches and reefs found around the island. Large amounts of waste gather in certain areas throughout the year, but particularly during monsoon season. As part of this activity, you will also work with the team to help educate locals and tourists about marine debris, the effect it has on the ecosystem, and the importance of keeping the area free from rubbish. The project aims to complete one beach/reef clean per week, but this can be more frequent.

## Personal Projects

If you are joining the project for 4 or more weeks, you will be encouraged to put your skills to use by working on a project of your own creation, designed to further aid marine conservation efforts in the area. These projects can vary depending on the individual, but might involve a focus on recycling, education, or new research strategies, to name but a few options. So play to your strengths, have fun, and don't be afraid to get creative!



# Itinerary

The below is an example of a 1-week itinerary for anyone joining who is already at least a PADI Open Water qualified diver and will not be completing any further dive courses. We do, however, recommend a minimum of 2 weeks to ensure you can get the most out of your itinerary. If you are not already a qualified diver or would like to complete an additional dive qualification, you will need to join the project for a minimum duration of two weeks, as your first week will be spent completing your dive course.

## Day 1

You will take a boat from the Kuala Besut jetty to the project site on the Perhentian Islands at 8am. Upon arrival, you will have some time to settle in and unpack before having lunch with the rest of your group and the project team. In the afternoon, you will take a tour of the local village before joining a water confidence session so the team can assess your dive skills. You will then have dinner with your group before enjoying an evening at leisure.

## Day 2

After an early breakfast, you will take part in a buoyancy dive session as you prepare to assist in research dives later in the week. You will also be taught how to use underwater camera equipment during this time. After lunch, you will have your first lecture at the dive base, with a focus on fish and photo identification. You will then enjoy some free time before dinner and an evening at leisure.

## Day 3

Enjoy an early breakfast before taking part in two separate photo ID dives. These will be in different locations and will focus on the identification of turtles and sharks in the area. After, you will break for a late lunch before heading to a lecture on corals and coral nurseries. The remainder of your afternoon will be free to spend as you wish before you sit down for dinner in the evening.

## Day 4

After breakfast you will embark on two research dives, with today's focus being on coral nurseries. You will assess and help to maintain the nurseries, and possibly help to deploy more of them into the water if required. After lunch, you will have free time to relax or work on a personal project before joining the rest of your group for dinner in the evening.

## Day 5

Another day, another dive – today you'll go on another early morning dive which will either focus on the coral nurseries or photo identification (depending on the needs of the project). In the afternoon you'll take part in either a beach or reef clean, before a change of scenery as you join the locals for a traditional Malay dinner and cooking class!

## Day 6

The arrival of the weekend marks a slightly more laid-back attitude at the project, with Saturday being dedicated to your own personal project. Whether you're focusing on education, recycling initiatives or conservation awareness, this is a great chance to put your creativity to the test.

## Day 7

Depending on the length of your stay, today will either be your departure day or your day off. If departing, you will check out of the accommodation and bid a fond farewell to the staff and your fellow volunteers before commencing your journey home. If you are staying, you can take the day to explore the beautiful local bays and beaches and maybe visit a nearby resort to relax and enjoy a few cold drinks as you watch the sun set.

# Accommodation

Whilst on the project, you will stay in the volunteer house which is dorm-style accommodation and shared on a mixed-gender basis with up to 4 people per room. Fans are provided and there is also a shared bathroom with cold showers and traditional squat toilets.

The house is cleaned every Sunday, but everyone is expected to clean up after themselves during the week. A washing machine is available and there is also a daily laundry service offered by the local villagers (for an additional fee). Lockers are also provided in each room so you can safely store your personal belongings and Wi-Fi is available, free of charge.

If you would prefer a little more privacy, you can upgrade to stay in a private room in a chalet, located in the nearby fishing village (a 5 minute walk away). These rooms have air-conditioning and en-suite bathrooms, but please be aware, they are dependent on availability and there is an additional fee to stay there.

# Food & Drink

You will be provided with three meals per day, except for on Sundays as this is a day off for everybody, including the project staff.

Breakfast tends to consist of simple foods, such as cereals, fruit and toast. However, if you fancy trying a traditional Malay breakfast, you're welcome to head into the village in search of somewhere to eat. Paratha bread with curry and coconut rice is highly recommended!

Lunch typically takes place at the volunteer house and generally consists of noodles or rice served alongside chicken, beef, fish or squid. Vegetarian and vegan options are also available. Dinner will consist of something similar, with dishes ranging from pasta and rice with various side dishes.

Volunteers will usually eat with project staff in the evenings, though once per week you will head into town to eat a traditional meal alongside members of the community, dining with a local family in their home and experiencing some true, authentic Malaysian dishes! Drinking water is provided, and tea is available at the dive house, but snacks and soft or alcoholic beverages must be purchased at your own expense from one of the village shops.





## What's Included

- Return boat transfers from Kuala Besut
- Accommodation and meals
- All dives and dive equipment
- A minimum of 6 dives per week
- All PIC cards and PADI manuals
- A monetary contribution to the project
- Wi-Fi

## Not Included

- Flights and airport transfers
- Travel insurance
- Visas (if required)
- Soft or alcoholic drinks and extra snacks
- PADI medical questionnaire - please ensure you take a completed PADI medical form with you, signed by your GP/ doctor

## Volunteer Reviews

### Eve

"My favourite memory was seeing a turtle on a dive about half a metre away! I could see it so clearly it was incredible!"



### Joey

"This experience had me reconnect with nature and start recognising how I could make a change. I learned so much yet still felt like I was on vacation!"



### Sarah

"I've never done anything more amazing than this. The snorkelling and diving in Malaysia is simply unforgettable."





## What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Perhentian Islands Marine Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to marine conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Malaysia!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

**#thegreatprojects**



[www.thegreatprojects.com](http://www.thegreatprojects.com)

+44 (0)208 885 4987