



A guide to the:

Raja Ampat Diving Project



The Raja Ampat Diving Project

Focus: Marine Life

Location: Raja Ampat

Start Date: Set Dates (Enquire For Details)

Arrival & Starting Point: Sorong

Located in the East Indonesia/West Papua region, this spectacular volunteer project is perfectly situated within the coral triangle – home to the highest known concentration of marine life on earth.

Also known as the 'Four Kings', Raja Ampat's 1500 small islands possess unfathomable mystery, with only 35 of those islands being inhabited. The oceans around Raja Ampat are famed for their diversity, becoming a dream destination for avid divers. What's more, the sheer volume of species endemic to this part of the world makes Raja Ampat a top priority for marine conservation, with its vast ecology only just being uncovered.

The waters around Raja Ampat contain 80% of all the world's coral species (10 times the amount found in the entire Caribbean!), and they are also home to 1350 species of fish, 6 of the world's 7 sea turtle species, and 27 varieties of marine mammal. Diversity unparalleled, it is no surprise that much of the waters here are classified as Protected Marine Areas.



Despite the impact of climate change and pollution on today's oceans, the reefs here have shown remarkable resistance to such threats. That said, it is still incredibly vital to protect these areas from issues such as coral bleaching and disease, as whatever happens in Raja Ampat will have a direct impact on the rest of the world's marine ecosystem.

By volunteering on this project, you will conduct research into the quality of Raja Ampat's reefs, help restore any that have been damaged or impacted by climate change, and collect data about the area's underwater habitats. By collecting data and mapping these coastal biospheres, you will be assisting the team in feeding back valuable information to the local government and communities, enabling them to best protect the reefs. You will also help the local school children in learning basic English, a skill which could well go on to provide them with better futures for themselves and their communities.

Above all else, you will have the opportunity to experience life on a remote, serene island, surrounded by phenomenal wildlife and tranquil blue waters. If you're looking for a taste of island paradise whilst also wishing to make a difference, the Raja Ampat Diving Project is for you.

Dive Training Programme

If you are an unqualified diver, you will spend your first week on the project learning how to dive, achieving both your PADI Open Water and Advanced Open Water Qualifications. With the assistance of a fully qualified scuba instructor, you will first learn the theory of diving before undertaking confined water sessions (no deeper than 5 metres). As soon as you're comfortable, you'll then move on to the open water sessions, diving to no deeper than 18 metres. When the time comes to move on to the Advanced Open Water section of training, you will undertake a series of dives (including a 'deep' dive of 30 metres, and a 'navigational' dive), followed by a 'peak performance buoyancy' dive to ensure that you're well prepared for the science dives!

If you are already qualified by the time you join the project, you will move on to the rest of the activities described in this guide.



Science Training & Lectures

During your time on the project, you will undertake a number of lectures alongside your fellow volunteers and the project's science officer to learn more about the marine life in the area and how best to protect it. Additionally, you will spend some time learning about basic reef biology and ecology, as well as learning how to identify the amazing coral, invertebrate, fish and plant species native to the area. Depending on how long you visit the project for, you may focus on either fish species or coral species in your lectures. In order to learn as much as possible about Raja Ampat's waters, we advise that you volunteer for a minimum of three weeks.



'Pointy Dives'

After learning how to identify the different fish and coral species in Raja Ampat, you will head out on 'pointy dives' alongside the marine biologist. The marine biologist will point to a fish or coral species before pointing to the name of the species on their dive slate, enabling volunteers to see what the species looks like underwater. Once everybody is satisfied that they've learned enough on the 'pointy dives', you will then undertake a 'validation dive', swimming alongside the marine biologist on a transect dive and independently writing down every target fish species you see. Upon returning to the surface, you will compare your dive slate notes with the biologist and, if your results match theirs by 85% or more, you will have passed your validation test! After this, you will be ready to take part in the data gathering science dives.



Data Gathering

The data you collect on your dives is incredibly important, as the information you gather will be used to show the health of the reef and will be passed on to the local government and the community. For example, observations of coral bleaching will enable the project to suggest best practices to these groups, improving the chances of building a healthier ecosystem for the future. This activity will take place numerous times per week, Monday-Friday, with Saturdays dedicated to 'fun dives' and Sundays spent at rest.



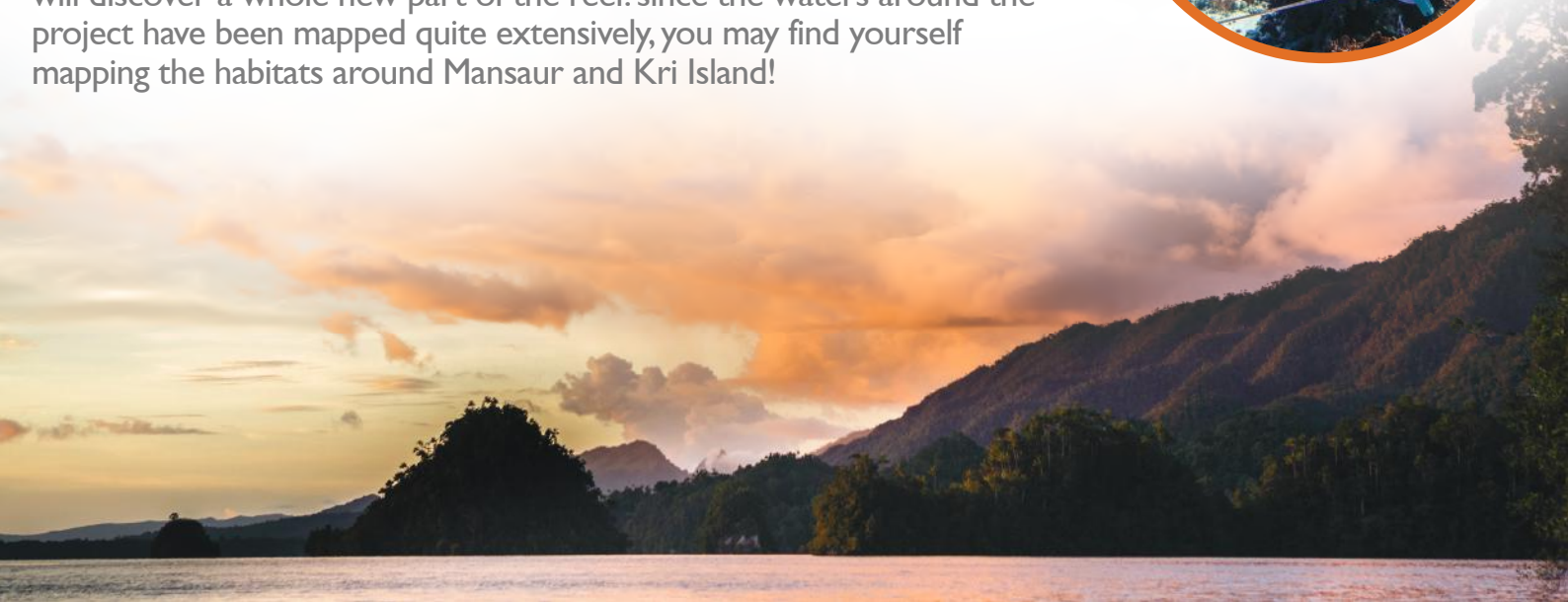
Reef Restoration

You will also take part in the reef restoration project, which uses the 'coral gardening' method to grow coral fragments in a nursery before they are planted in a reef that previous research has indicated to have been both physically damaged and affected by coral bleaching. Each week you will identify, monitor, measure and maintain the corals, as well as clean the nurseries. The aim of this is to accelerate the recovery of the damaged reefs on the eastern side of Arborek Island and contribute to research that will aid the long-term restoration of these, and other reefs. The team also engage the local children in this work, so if you are staying for 4 weeks or more, you will work with the children as part of the Arborek 'Reef Warriors' program to make a new coral line and plant it in the nursery.



Mapping

If you volunteer for three weeks or more, you may have the opportunity to map the area around Raja Ampat, learning about the quality of the reefs and their habitats - a vital task, as this information is very useful to the local government and communities and, without volunteer assistance, this task would simply never get completed. Depending on when you visit the project, you may be taught how to undertake this activity, but it may be that other projects take precedence (such as reef checks, coral watch, manta surveys, and so forth). If this activity does take place, you will discover a whole new part of the reef: since the waters around the project have been mapped quite extensively, you may find yourself mapping the habitats around Mansaur and Kri Island!





Manta Ray Identification

If you volunteer between October to May, you may be lucky enough to spot manta rays, as this is their breeding season! This a particularly good window to consider travelling, as plankton blooms draw greater numbers of rays to the area. In this case, you may help to record manta appearances. You will attend a lecture by the Manta Ray Project Scientists where you will learn how to identify the animals by the markings on their bellies. Every manta has unique markings, and should you get the chance to dive with the mantas, you will have the opportunity to use your own camera to take photos of them. You will then clean up the images in Photoshop, examining the images and attempting to match them back to the manta rays already logged in the project's database.

Local Community Work

One of the most rewarding parts of this project is your involvement with the local school children! Take part in their classes, leading basic English lessons and playing games, from jump rope to fun, educational activities. A popular initiative on the programme is the Dental Hygiene Project: after noticing that a lot of the children on the island were not familiar with brushing their teeth, the team decided to provide them with resources and to make an activity we find so mundane, into a fun task for the locals! There are daily 'tooth brushing parties' put in place to encourage the little ones to take care of their oral health - you may even sing the 'teeth brushing song', written by a previous visitor to the island!



Free Time

Whilst diving is the main draw of the project, it's important to take rest days. For this reason, Sundays are complete 'no-dive days', and you are free to spend your downtime in a variety of ways: sunbathe, relax with a book, play beach volleyball or simply stroll around the island! On Wednesdays, you may also have the opportunity to head to Wasai (Raja Ampat's capital) to use the internet and buy any personal luxuries.

Evenings at the project site can be rather social, and the project hosts murder mystery nights, fancy dress parties, and movie nights from time to time. This is an excellent opportunity to unwind and to get to know your fellow volunteers better.



Itinerary

Below is an example of a three-week itinerary, however this is a guideline and is subject to change. Please note that you need to arrive either early morning or the day before the project start date in order to meet at The Ignislo Sorong Hotel for 8am. You will also need to arrange a flight departing the day after the project finish date.

Day 1

The day begins at 8am, when you will meet a project facilitator at the The Ignislo Sorong Hotel. Transfer to the ferry port (opposite the hotel) to catch a boat to the project site on Arborek Island. Upon arrival, take time to settle in and explore your surroundings, as well as to meet your fellow volunteers! (Please note: on arrival into Waisai, you'll need to pay 1,000,000 IRD, approximately £50, for the Raja Ampat Marine Reserve Fee.)

Days 2-7

If you are an unqualified diver, you will spend this week earning your qualifications; otherwise, you will take part in a series of transect and survey dives (typically 2 dives per day), as well as some science lectures. In addition to diving and joining lectures, you will take part in a variety of the other activities mentioned above, such as working with the local school children on an array of fun tasks!

Days 8-21

From this point onwards, you will continue your survey dives, helping the team to fill up their database of information about the local area. If you wish, you can take the opportunity to complete your Emergency First Response and Rescue Diver qualifications, but please note that the Rescue Diver qualification will be at an additional cost. (Note: you will need to have your own PIC and manuals for any dive courses you wish to take part in.)

Day 22

Sadly, your final day has arrived - say farewell to your new-found friends and wave goodbye to Arborek Island, as you'll transfer back to Sorong. Spend one final night in Sorong before boarding your flight home, or commencing your independent travel plans!

Please note that, while it is possible to earn your diving qualifications on this project, a fairly high level of fitness is required, as is a good lung capacity - you needn't be an athlete, but if you have any respiratory conditions you may want to reconsider this project. In the instance of such a condition, you will need to have a letter signed off by your GP.

You will of course need to be a strong swimmer, without fear of underwater submersion, and your proficiency in-water will be monitored by the staff at the project site before you are permitted to undertake any survey dives.

While Monday to Friday is reserved for science dives and lectures, you will get to take part in 'fun dives' on a Saturday. Sunday, however, is a 'no dive day', giving you time to rest.



Accommodation

Whilst on the project, you will be staying in a bungalow on the beach which has been hand-built by the local community using traditional methods and materials. All are equipped with bunk beds, mattresses, pillows, basic linen and mosquito nets, and are typically shared on a same-sex basis, however this cannot always be guaranteed. There are western-style toilets (flushable with a bucket of sea water) and a wash-room, where a large container of water can be found, alongside a scoop for showering. All bungalows have electricity and a number of power points, though power is only available for use between the hours of 6pm and 6am.

While Aborek Island is rather beautiful, please note that your accommodation will not be of a luxury standard, and that living conditions are very basic. When on the project you will be expected to keep your living area clean and also take part in a cleaning rota with the other volunteers and staff, which involves completing a cleaning task for 30 minutes every other day. The project is built on a foundation of teamwork and communication, so as long as you are willing to get involved and do your part, then you are sure to have a fantastic time.

For couples, or even friends travelling together, one bungalow on the island has 2 private rooms, which you are able to upgrade to at a cost of £120 per week depending on availability.



Food & Drink

Three meals per day are provided for you on this project, and are based on local cuisine and seasonal availability of locally produced food. These meals are prepared and cooked by local staff, except on Sundays when expedition staff and volunteers will work together to prepare and cook all meals. The project staff are able to cater to dietary requirements, but please let us know of your needs well in advance as supplies are only collected once a week from Wasai (a journey made only by boat). Additionally, fresh water is limited to 22 gallons per week, so do please be considerate of your fellow volunteers. Please bring a drinking container (i.e. suitable large water bottle) to fill up before heading out on the dive boat.

What's Included

- Accommodation
- All dives (12 a week when possible)
- Transfers between Waisai Port and base-camp
- 3 meals a day, as well as tea, coffee and water
- 24-hour field support staff
- Buoyancy control device (BCD) and regulator hire for the first week of your expedition (only if your booking includes an open water or advanced open water course)
- Comprehensive science training programme
- Air tanks, weights and weight belts (all divers)
- PADI Emergency First Response course (worth £100)

Not Included

- All flights
- Any vaccinations
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Ferry transfers and taxi costs
- PADI manuals and dive certification (Positive Identification Card - PIC)
- Personal diving equipment
- Additional dive courses - Rescue (£200) and Divemaster (£350)
- Raja Ampat Marine Reserve Park fee (IDR 1,000,000)
- Dive slate - you must bring your own with you

Volunteer Reviews

Lena

"The marine life is out of this world. Every dive was incredible - always something amazing, and the coral is so rich and full of life."



Jasmine

"The whole experience was so amazing! I will never forget the first time I got to dive with mantas."



Nanna

"Each dive was amazing - it really is a true paradise both above and under the water. We were surrounded by the best people who are all dedicated to marine life."





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Raja Ampat Diving 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 Indonesia!



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

#thegreatprojects



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