



A guide to the:
Sri Lanka Marine Conservation Project



The Sri Lanka Marine Conservation Project

Focus: Marine Wildlife

Location: Sri Lanka

Start Date: Every Sunday

Arrival & Starting Point: Colombo

Kalpitiya, home to the Sri Lanka Marine Conservation Project, is a simple village town fairly unexplored by everyday tourists; those that venture to these northern reaches likely have a hard-core passion for kitesurfing, but as of late, the Kalpitiya peninsula is revealing itself as a coastal paradise and as Sri Lanka's newest hotspot for whale and dolphin watching.

Sri Lanka as a whole is blessed with rich marine biodiversity, but while it is an island with a huge number of people making a living from harvesting marine resources or from marine-based tourism, there were very few educational programs or materials covering the country's threatened marine species until the creation of this project. Over one million Sri Lankans depend upon fisheries for their income by exploiting aquatic resources, with this in mind the project aims to integrate scientific research and community-based education and conservation.



This project focuses on the Kalpitiya-Karaitive-Puttalam Coastal Complex, which is just that; complex. Housing bar reefs, estuaries, deltas, mangrove forests, marshes, beaches, sand dunes and salt pans, it's no surprise that the area is a wetland of international importance. The Bar Reef alone is home to 156 coral species and 283 types of fish. The coastal waters welcome nearly 30 species of marine mammals, including spinner, bottlenose and Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, blue and sperm whales, sea turtles, and the elusive dugong. The coastal and off-shore ecosystems also provide vital resting and feeding zones for many bird species that migrate along the South Asian flyway.

As a volunteer, you'll participate in field observations, helping gather information on sea turtles, pink dolphins, dugongs, fish, seabirds, and various other coastal flora and fauna that you happen across. You'll visit villages and fishing colonies, talking directly to locals and conducting surveys to understand their livelihoods and how they impact the marine environment. You'll also discuss their issues and concerns; and how this project can help make their marine-based livelihoods sustainable.

Combining their passion for marine life and community, the team is dedicated to making a difference from the bottom of the ocean to the seabirds in the sky and everything in between. Join them on their mission and immerse yourself in the shores of Sri Lanka.



Whale & Dolphin ID Observation

Heading out to sea by boat, you'll go in search of whale and dolphin pods to gather information. Volunteers will collect data such as species, behavioural anecdotes, and location. You'll also note how each of these correlates with the season. This is an opportunity to watch these incredible creatures interact with each other and sometimes even the boats. Don't forget to bring along your camera for those breaches and jump shots!

Pink Dolphin, Dugong & Lagoon Fauna Observation

Volunteers will take several trips to the lagoon seeking the elusive dugong and playful pink dolphins. A key component of this activity is to identify any threats in the area to these species; dugongs are classified as critically endangered, and pink dolphins, while only considered near threatened, are sadly regularly harmed by human activity and fishing practices. During this excursion, you'll take photos to help develop identification catalogues and learn to record GPS points using GIS mapping software, which allows the team to track the mammals' movements. While in the lagoon, you'll also monitor other marine life, such as sea turtles and take observational notes where possible.



Seagrass Meadows Monitoring

Shallow coastal waters contain exceptionally rich marine habitats. A lesser-known and appreciated shallow water habitat is seagrass meadows. Both biologically diverse and economically valuable, seagrass meadows provide resting spots and foods for iconic species like dugongs, sea turtles and seahorses. They help sequester carbon, improve water quality, and are nursery grounds for numerous finfish and shellfish species. Despite these important services, they are among the planet's most threatened marine habitats. Volunteers will conduct transects by boat, surveying the lagoon to pinpoint new seagrass meadows. During the surveys, you'll look to identify different seagrass species, their range of distribution, life cycle and growth.



Seabird Observations

Seabirds are indicator species and key to significant information about the marine environment. Through migration, foraging and nesting, seabirds bring the island and sea into a symbiotic relationship. Their way of life contributes to the health of island plants and wildlife, and in return, the island provides resources that support their survival and the diversity of seabird species. You'll help conduct the long-term monitoring of seabird species along the coast and in the lagoon. Volunteers will use various methods, such as sample plots or whole-colony counts from air, sea or photos. You'll also take video recordings, identify any threats, including invasive species, and go in search of beached birds for study.



Fisherman Surveys

Volunteers are entrusted with a meaningful mission: to venture into villages and fishing colonies, seeking a deeper understanding of their way of life and the intricate relationship the fisherman share with the marine environment. Through these immersive visits, volunteers are offered a unique chance to conduct surveys and engage in discussions with the villagers, placing special emphasis on the challenges and concerns that shape their livelihoods. The overarching goal is to uncover pathways towards sustainable marine-based livelihoods for these communities, fostering a harmonious coexistence between human activities and the fragile marine ecosystem.

Beach Transects

By monitoring the beach regularly and year-round, the volunteer observations form baseline data which aids scientists in identifying patterns in beach dynamics. You'll help assess environmental situations that may need attention, measure marine debris, and conduct beach clean-ups, especially in turtle breeding grounds, and best yet, you may have the opportunity to observe sea turtles preparing to nest! Most importantly, you'll head to beaches where litter is becoming mountainous and record data given to the government to stress the need for intervention.



Itinerary

Below is an example of a 2-week itinerary on the project. While research goals are planned in advance, daily and monthly activities can change rapidly and dramatically depending on local situations and occurrences. Volunteers are likely to experience more activities the longer they decide to stay.

Day 1

Upon arrival at Colombo airport, a project representative will meet you and transfer you to a hotel located in Ambepussa. This will serve as your accommodation for the first night. Take the opportunity to relax or explore but make sure to get a well-rested night's sleep before early pick-up the next day!

Day 2 -15

On day 2, you'll be picked up at 6am and will be transferred to the project site. After settling in you'll be fully equipped to start your project days! You'll venture out by boat and spend plenty of time on the beach undertaking the activities mentioned previously. Some days will start very early, anywhere from 5:30am-6am, and others will provide volunteers with a lay-in. Starting each day with tea and a briefing, you may have breakfast after this or take a packed breakfast to eat during your first activity. Volunteers will have a lunch hour from 12:30pm and partake in a few tasks before dinner at around 7:30pm, with films, discussions and free time after this.

Weekends are free for you to spend as you wish, the team are more than happy to make recommendations for exploring Sri Lanka. Kalpitiya is known as a kitesurfing haven, so you might want to try the area's most popular pastime or relax at the field house!

Day 16

Sadly, your time here has come to an end, but you'll have left your mark and will be leaving with incredible memories in tow. Today, you'll make your way back to the airport for your return flight home or to commence your onward travel plans.



Accommodation

Volunteers will be accommodated in a small, family-run beach resort in Kalpitiya. The resort has eight rooms, allocated to volunteers on a twin-share, same-sex basis (unless volunteering as a couple). The rooms include air conditioning or fans, universal plug points and fresh linen, and the private bathrooms have a western-style toilet and hot showers available. Around the resort, you can stroll along the beach, settle in a hammock with a good book, or head into town in your free time and with weekends at your leisure, you can always arrange some exciting activities through the resort (at an additional charge) such as snorkelling, diving or windsurfing!



Food & Drink

Three meals per day are prepared for you by the project team and served on a self-serve basis. Some days, packed breakfasts or lunches will be made and taken with you into the field, allowing you to make the most of your conservation experience. The food will consist of local and Western cuisine with vegetarian and vegan diets catered for with prior notice. Coffee, tea and water will be available throughout the day, and you can purchase extra snacks or soft drinks in town, which you can store at the resort. (Please note; drinking alcohol is not permitted during the working week but can be bought for the weekend).



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Arrival airport transfer and accommodation in Ambepussa
- Transfer from Ambepussa to project site
- Three meals per day
- Full orientation and support
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- Flights
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Departure transfer (can be arranged for an additional fee)

What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Sri Lanka Marine Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to marine wildlife 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 Sri Lanka!



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

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