



WHALE SHARK RESEARCH & CONSERVATION, PALAWAN PROJECT PROFILE

2024



Project: Palawan Whale Shark Research & Conservation Project

Location: Puerto Princesa, Palawan

Minimum Stay: 3 months

Placement Donation: US\$2,2500 (\$750 a month)

Survey Season: *Batch 1:* April 1 – June 30
Batch 2: July 1 – September 30

Project Type: Remote field work, Snorkel-based, Free-diving

Key Requirements: Physically fit to swim at moderate-exerting pace for minutes, free-diving skills to 7 m, able to work long hours at sea, 21 years old, positive attitude, attention to detail, contributive member of a small team



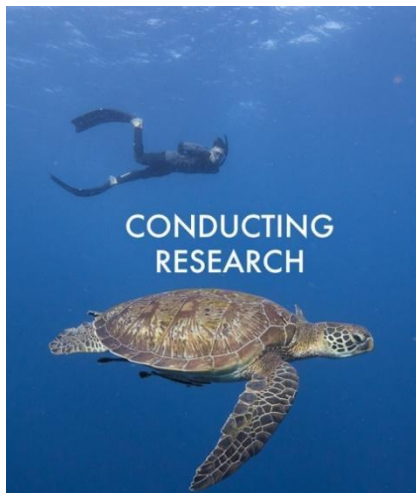
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About LAMAVE

Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (“LAMAVE Research Institute”) is a Filipino non-profit organisation dedicated to the research and conservation of marine megafauna and the marine environment in the Philippines. We focus our efforts on charismatic marine megafauna, using it as an umbrella species to protect the wider marine environment.

A key aspect of our work is to identify hotspots and quantify populations of species including whale sharks, turtles and manta rays. Using photo-identification we are building national catalogues for these species and identifying key habitats within the country. We compliment this work with the use technology, such as satellite and acoustic tags to help determine key habitat sites, home ranges and migratory corridors of marine species. The results are shared with governments and stakeholders, to work together to minimise impacts and develop tools for conservation management such as creating or zoning marine protected areas or advising policy. [You can read more about our conservation impacts, here.](#)

[There are three key components to our work](#)



Applying research-based solutions to conservation challenges



Ensuring a legacy through the transfer of skills for long term impact on the ground



Securing a future for marine megafauna by advancing the knowledge of the people that can protect them

Why the Philippines?

The Philippines is located in the center of the Coral Triangle, the 'global center of marine biodiversity', an area which is home to 1000's of marine species, especially large marine megafauna. Over 200 species of sharks and rays, 26 species of whales and dolphins, 5 species of turtles and the dugong are all found within Philippine waters. [It is currently recognized as hosting the second largest population of whale sharks in the world.](#) However, many of these species are now listed as threatened or endangered due to a degradation of their natural environment, unregulated fishing practices, incidental capture, and pollution.

SCIENCE-BASED RESEARCH

All LAMAVE research sites are based in the Philippines and, to date, the team has worked in ten different provinces including: Palawan, Bohol, Cebu, Southern Leyte, Negros Oriental, Davao Oriental, Misamis Oriental, Surigao del Norte, Sorsogon and Mindoro Occidental. We currently have eight active field sites studying whale sharks, rays, turtles, dolphins and sharks.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We firmly believe in engaging the public through community outreach programs to raise awareness for marine conservation. Working closely with local governments, communities, businesses and tourists we adopt an integrated approach combining research and education to protect the unique biodiversity of the Philippine seas.

FACILITATING THE NEEDS OF NATIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Active engagement and involvement with local stakeholders is crucial if we hope to provide the necessary changes to maintain and improve marine ecosystems.



About the Project

The Puerto Princesa whale shark project operates out of Honda Bay in Puerto Princesa, Palawan with the objective of assessing the seasonal distribution of whale sharks in the area. Our goal is to identify individual whale sharks and their movement in the area using non-invasive methods such as photo identification and GPS tracking. We hope to gain an overview and a better understanding of the presence and ecology of whale sharks visiting Honda Bay in order to assist in their conservation by working with local government units and the local community. This could be in the form of an advisory role for potential conservation laws as Palawan has a separate and independent governing body for natural resource management from the entire Philippines (Palawan Council for Sustainable Development) or sharing our work and best management practices at Information Education Communication events at local schools/barangay meetings. Some questions we would like to address are whether the whale sharks visit the bay because of the presence of a particular type of prey or are opportunistically feeding on different prey species, whether these individuals have been sighted in other project sites within the Philippines and/or internationally via satellite tagging, abundance of whale sharks per season, and human-shark interactions that can affect the rising whale shark tourism industry within the area. This is accomplished by conducting randomized surveys around the Bay on both a small outrigger boat (bangka) and onboard the local tourist vessel.



Why We Need You?

Volunteers are a fundamental part of LAMAVE, many of our projects rely on the hard work and dedication of volunteers from the Philippines and around the world. As a volunteer your main role is to collect data in the field that contributes to LAMAVE's research outputs, including [scientific publications](#), policy and [education](#).

As a volunteer you play a crucial role in our work. By joining the team, you commit time and effort to collecting data for scientific research, your donation helps supports project sites long-term, expanding what we could achieve with grants and other funding alone. Finally, your interest and willingness to learn, inspires us for the next generation; your skills, knowledge and passion for the marine world will grow and help shape your choices after this experience.

To date, LAMAVE have trained over 250 volunteers from over 30 countries. Our past volunteers and scholars form an alumni - the "LAMAVE Family" – who continue to help our conservation efforts, through fundraising, assisting in events and sharing opportunities and projects with one another.



"The last ten weeks have been a truly wonderful experience, full of learning curves, good company, questionable Tagalog pronunciation and stunning whale shark encounters."

- Isabel (Issie) Hassall

What You'll Learn

By the end of your time here, you will have a good understanding of the work LAMAVE conducts on whale shark research around the Philippines, whale shark ecology and behavioral cues, the daily operations of a marine conservation NGO and what the challenges/obstacle a project can face, the local conservation laws and how it is being implemented/monitored, different fishing methods of small scale fisheries, and the culture of the Filipino people.

You will learn how to create maps using QGIS, give briefings to large groups of various cultural backgrounds/foreign nationalities, address people in a professional manner, budget, and basic account logging, identify whale shark behavior, plankton sampling techniques and procedure, using photo identification as a powerful tool for assessing abundance and distribution of individual whale sharks via citizen science and local surveys.

There is a high possibility of physical benefits such as an increase in stamina and stronger cardiovascular output from swimming at high intensity for short bursts at a time. You will develop your interpersonal and communication skills as we are working in a small team environment consisting of 5 members. Working in a small team environment fosters the development of reliability and accountability for your actions, team work, and adaptability to become a constructive member of the team.

You will be immersed in a different cultural environment where you have the possibility to gain a different perspective and broaden your scope of learning.



Working Life

We work a 6-day week, with one day off a week. Days off and survey work are on a rotation schedule. A general week will be a mixture of in-water and on-land days, with an average day starting at 6:00 am and generally finishes by 4:00 pm, or once tasks are complete. Weather dependent, you will be in the water 4-5 days and on land 1-2 days a week.

During an average in-water day you will conduct surveys from tour boat 'bangkas' and local outrigger pumpboats collecting photo-identification of whale sharks encountered and recording tourist behavior and compliance to the local code of conduct. You will be out on surveys for 5 -7 hours at a time, and in-water dependent on whale shark sightings. **Volunteers must be strong swimmers** and feel comfortable swimming in the ocean for prolonged periods of time.

Land days encompass a variety of tasks including encoding of citizen science submissions from social media platforms of whale shark encounters from various regions across the Philippines; creation of educational materials i.e., presentation, games, and activities for school programs with the local communities; maintaining the local catalog of identified whale shark individuals throughout the season surveys; environmental data encoding and analysis; and managing the local tourism database.



Sample Schedule of a Typical Day

TIME	ACTIVITY on in-water day	Activity on land day
05:30	Breakfast	
07:00	Survey start	
08:00	Survey	Breakfast
8:30	Survey	Complete on-land tasks that will be assigned by your project leader (e.g. Data clean-up from previous days)
9:00	Hop on tourist or pump boat	On-land tasks
9:15	Start of in-water survey	On-land tasks
12:30 – 13:00	Return to Puerto Princesa	Help with household chores: shopping, cooking, cleaning
13:30	Lunch	Lunch
14:30	Data-input/ free-time	On-land tasks/ free-time
18:00	Dinner	Dinner
22:00	Curfew	Curfew

* Unfortunately, survey days depend strictly on weather conditions, availability and schedule of tourist boats. We therefore stress that surveys might only happen twice a week



Volunteer Requirements

Please ensure you meet the following criteria:

- At least 21 years old
- Minimum commitment of 3 months
- Proficiency in English & computer skills
- Excellent swimming/snorkeling skills and ability to free-dive to 7 m
- Physically fit enough to spend several hours a day on a boat and/or in the water, frequently in rough conditions and current
- Ability to live closely with a small community and respect their culture
- Able to work independently and as part of a team
- Comfortable living in a shared home and in a remote setting with extremely basic amenities
- Strong work ethic with a willingness to work long and sometimes irregular hours if necessary
- Strong interest in whale sharks, marine biology, environmental research, and conservation
- A degree in marine science, zoology, environmental sciences, or related subjects *are preferred*

Equipment Required

- Mask
- Snorkel
- Waterproof Digital watch
- Free Diving Fins (Free diving fins are mandatory)
- Leggings and a long sleeve rash vest/ rash suit (for protection from the sun and stingers when in the water)
- Knee length board shorts (must be worn during surveys)
- Rash guard (must be worn during surveys)
- Hat & Sunglasses (polarized if possible)
- Long (smart/jeans) trousers (for formal occasions)
- Light weight, long sleeved tops and trousers recommended to protect against biting insects
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Torch/flashlight
- Travel adapter (Philippines is Type A parallel outlet, 220V)
- Laptop (this is essential for work)
- Dry bag
- Small backpack
- Phone that is capable of running *WhatsApp*
- Raincoat
- Sunscreen (please by reef safe sunscreen if possible, to help protect the environment)

Recommended General Packing List

- Towel
- Small dry bag/Ziploc bag for electrical
- Casual clothing
- Swimwear
- Waterproof camera (for days off)
- Insect repellent
- Bandana
- Ladies using tampons are encouraged to bring extra from home as they are less accessible here in the Philippines. If you are looking for a travel-environment-cost friendly alternative many of our team recommend menstrual cups, but it's worth trying this at home first 😊

We strongly recommend bringing all required gear from home rather than trying to purchase them here.

Donation

Many of our actions to protect marine ecosystems in Southeast Asia rely on core funding. Research grants and independent funding support key initiatives and our team are continually fundraising. Volunteer donations play an incredibly important role in supporting LAMAVEs conservation outputs and are central in enabling the long-term activity of our research sites. To join the team, we request a donation of \$2,250 USD for the three-month placement (\$750 per month). This donation supports the long-term running of the project site and your place within the team during your stay.

Volunteers are central to our operation and we appreciate the financial commitment and hard work you put into the organisation and its conservation goals. We look forward to having you join us in the field.



What's Included During Your Placement?

Accommodation

You will be provided with a bed in the project house. The house is a communal, shared living space that is shared by the team (volunteers, scholars, Research Assistants and the Project Leader). All team members are required to stay at the project house throughout their stay, this is for health and safety and for teamwork purposes.

There is a kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, a communal space, and an outside area for relaxing. Beds are within shared bedrooms and each volunteer will be given space for their personal items. There are generally 5 volunteers, a Project Leader and Research Assistant living in the house. The project houses use fans, and not air conditioning. Amenities are basic but comfortable and the house has the character of a research base. All volunteers are expected to share the daily chores (i.e. shopping, cooking, washing dishes, filling up the water tank, locking up at night).

The project house is located in Puerto Princesa, Palawan and although we are in the "city" it is still quite underdeveloped and has a provincial lifestyle feel. Access to luxury goods, specific medications, imported/foreign brands are limited. The closest location which has these amenities is Manila or Cebu City (direct flights are available).

There is no Wi-Fi in the house, however internet access is available with a personal SIM card, see the section on 'Cell Phone Service' below.

Meals

You'll be provided with three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Food and cooking is communal, so it is essential that volunteers provide their food intolerances, strict preferences and allergies in their application. The majority of the time, the food we serve is vegan/vegetarian and is sourced within the local community. Ingredients are often limited but the cooking creativity of the team often makes up for this! Meat is available once a week to those that want it during our team BBQ. Snacks and luxury items are not included.

Cost of Research

Transport costs associated with the project will be covered. For example, transport to and from the field jump off point and the project house, in field boat-based surveys work, and other logistics associated with educational activities, training, community

events, etc. You will be provided with a LAMAVE uniform and you will be using project equipment such as project underwater cameras and GPS during your placement.

What's Not Included In Your Placement?

Travel to the Project Site

You are expected to organize and cover the cost of travel to the project site.

There are daily flights from Manila or Cebu City (which are the two international airports in the Philippines) to Puerto Princesa City. Make sure to check the flight departure schedules beforehand.

Insurance and Medical Care

All volunteers are required to have medical insurance. The study sites for the projects are often in remote areas. All medical services in the Philippines need to be paid for by individual volunteers. Costs vary from PHP50 for a consultation at the local hospital to PHP 8000 for a full CTI scan in most hospitals. Volunteers that contract a contagious disease, that may put other volunteers and staff at risk, may be asked to depart from the project study site for health reasons until appropriate health clearance.

Visas

On entering the country most visitors are allowed to stay in the country for 30 days without applying for a visa, but please check the terms for your nationality. Before the 30 days are over you must renew your visa (online renewal is an option). The first renewal lasts for 30 days and costs approximately 3000PHP. If you plan to stay in the country after this visa date, you will need to renew again and will be required to purchase an i-card (a tourist identity card) with your visa. This will cost approximately 6000PHP for the i- card and a 1-month extension. *Please note this information was correct as of July 2023 and may be subject to change. For more information regarding visas, visit www.immigration.gov.ph.

Other Important Information

Vaccinations

Vaccinations for Covid-19 are mandatory. We suggest we check with a travel doctor before arriving in the Philippines.

Dengue Fever: Dengue is a viral infection spread by mosquitoes. It's widespread in many parts of the world and does exist in the Philippines. In most people the infection is mild and passes in about a week without causing any lasting problems, but in rare cases it can be very serious and potentially life threatening. There have been known cases of Dengue fever in the Philippines. There's no specific treatment or widely available vaccine for dengue, so it's important to try to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes when visiting an area where the infection is found. All volunteers must pack long sleeve clothes and pyjamas to be worn on placement and apply mosquito repellent. It's your duty to take responsibility for your wellbeing.

Food Intolerance & Allergies

Project accommodation, food and cooking is communal and thus it is essential that you specify any food intolerance, strict preferences, or allergies in your application cover letter. Some food intolerances and allergies are impossible to control and accommodate in the project environment and for your own safety you must give full disclosure in your application. Please note that many of our projects are unable to support strict vegan diets, this is due to the remoteness and the limited range of food in some of our sites, making it impossible to have a healthy balanced vegan diet.

Cellphone Service

The cell phone service in the Philippines is excellent, and 3G service is widely available. We advise volunteers to purchase a local **Globe or SMART** SIM card, which can be used to obtain cheap internet deals. We recommend a surf only plan with unlimited data, which will cost 599 PHP (ask us to help you set it up). A promo offering 2GB of data valid for 7 days is also available for 90PHP. Cell phone load cards are available in Pintuyan and range from 100PHP-500PHP. Near the project base, there are loading stations in small stores. We highly recommend you bring or purchase a smart phone, as many of our project communications take place over WhatsApp.

Days off

Each team member will be given a dedicated day off each week to relax or travel. Days off can be spent taking in the many wonders and unique culture of the Philippines.

Holidays and Visitors

As a volunteer you are contracted to assist LAMAVE for a minimum of 3 months, therefore should you wish to have time to explore the Philippines further (which we strongly advise you do!) please plan time before or after your stay with us, as during the three months placement under normal circumstances we do not allow volunteers to take additional days off.

Visitors are not allowed to enter the project house without the prior coordination and approval of the Project Leader. This is for safety purposes and courtesy to other team members.

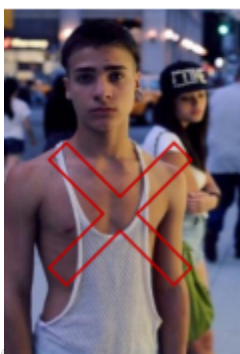
Professionalism

LAMAVEs research would not be possible without local and national government permission, community support, funders and collaborators. Behaving professionally both in and out of the water is essential. LAMAVE have an important role to play and every team member from staff to volunteers are expected to work hard and act professionally.

Dress Code

On duty, you should wear your LAMAVE t-shirt, which you will be provided with. This is your uniform. Volunteers continue to represent LAMAVE, even after work is finished, therefore, we enforce a dress code that is consistent and inoffensive to the local community and culture.

Shorts must be at least mid-thigh in length. Shorts that reach just above the knee are preferred. Hot pants and very short shorts are forbidden. T-shirts and long sleeve shirts are recommended. Spaghetti strap and slinky tops that reveal undergarments (see photos) are forbidden.



Grounds for Dismissal

Volunteers may be asked to leave the project if they display inappropriate behaviour or attitude that disrupts work, the living environment or portrays a negative image for the organization. Grounds for dismissal can also be as a result of release of sensitive information to media/social media platforms. Dismissal is at the Project Leader's discretion. The use of drugs during the placement is prohibited and will result in immediate dismissal.

How to Apply?

Fill in the application form on our website: <http://www.lamave.org/volunteer>

For more information visit you can visit <http://www.lamave.org/volunteer-faqs> or email us at volunteer@lamave.org

We look forward to having you join the #LAMAVEfamily



THANK YOU | DAGHANG SALAMAT | MARAMING SALAMAT