

Volunteer Information Pack: Monitoring the Asian Small-clawed otter, Palawan.



LAMAVE

The Large Marine Vertebrates Project (LAMAVE) was created in 2010 to support marine conservation in the Philippines through scientific research and education. Physalus, an Italian non-profit organization that works to protect the environment through marine conservation initiatives, originally pioneered the project. At present, LAMAVE is a collaboration between Physalus (IT), and the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (PH).

The Large Marine Vertebrates Project works closely with national and local governments, local communities, and tourists to ensure the conservation of marine megafauna. By using scientific data collection we are gaining a greater understanding of the species abundance, distribution and key threats for many marine animals in this region. This information is used to enable LAMAVE to take action to conserve them.

Our team is a collaboration of local & international researchers and volunteers. Their research takes them all over the Philippines, collecting scientific data while training the next generation of Filipino conservationists and raising awareness about the marine environment.

Our international staff has varied backgrounds, from veterinary medicine, to marine science, statistics, graphic arts, and law, but we all share a passion for the ocean in any of its form.



Volunteer Requirements

- At least 18 years old
- Available to stay a minimum of 3 months, **between February 1st and June 5th 2016**
- Ability to work independently and in a team.
- Willing to work long hours if needed
- Be fit enough to walk for multiple hours
- Comfortable with living in a shared house with only basic amenities.
- Proficiency in English.
- A degree in marine science or biology is preferred.

The Placement

Volunteers are required to stay for a minimum of 3 months. Volunteer duties include:

- Preparing survey equipment and materials
- Surveying the area looking for evidence of holts, latrines or scratch walls or for the groups themselves
- Collecting fecal samples for genetic studies
- Cleaning fecal samples to determine diet
- Setting up and putting away and maintaining the equipment
- Daily input of data collected in the field into the database
- Analyzing camera trap footage
- House cleaning & cooking duties
- Writing a blog post once a month for our website & Facebook account.

Being a non-profit NGO, **we ask for volunteers to make a monthly contribution on \$400 USD to the project that will help to cover living expenses.** We ask that half your contribution be paid via bank transfer or PayPal prior to arrival, while the other half to be paid upon your arrival in either Philippine pesos or US dollars.

This allows us to provide you with:

- Accommodation
- Three meals a day
- Public transport to and from survey sites
- Otter shark biology and survey training
- LAMAVE T-shirts
- Equipment usage for the duration of the project

The project is **unable** to cover costs for:

- Flight/transport to/from Palawan
- Insurance for the duration of the project
- Visas
- Extra snacks and alcoholic beverages
- Leisurely activities

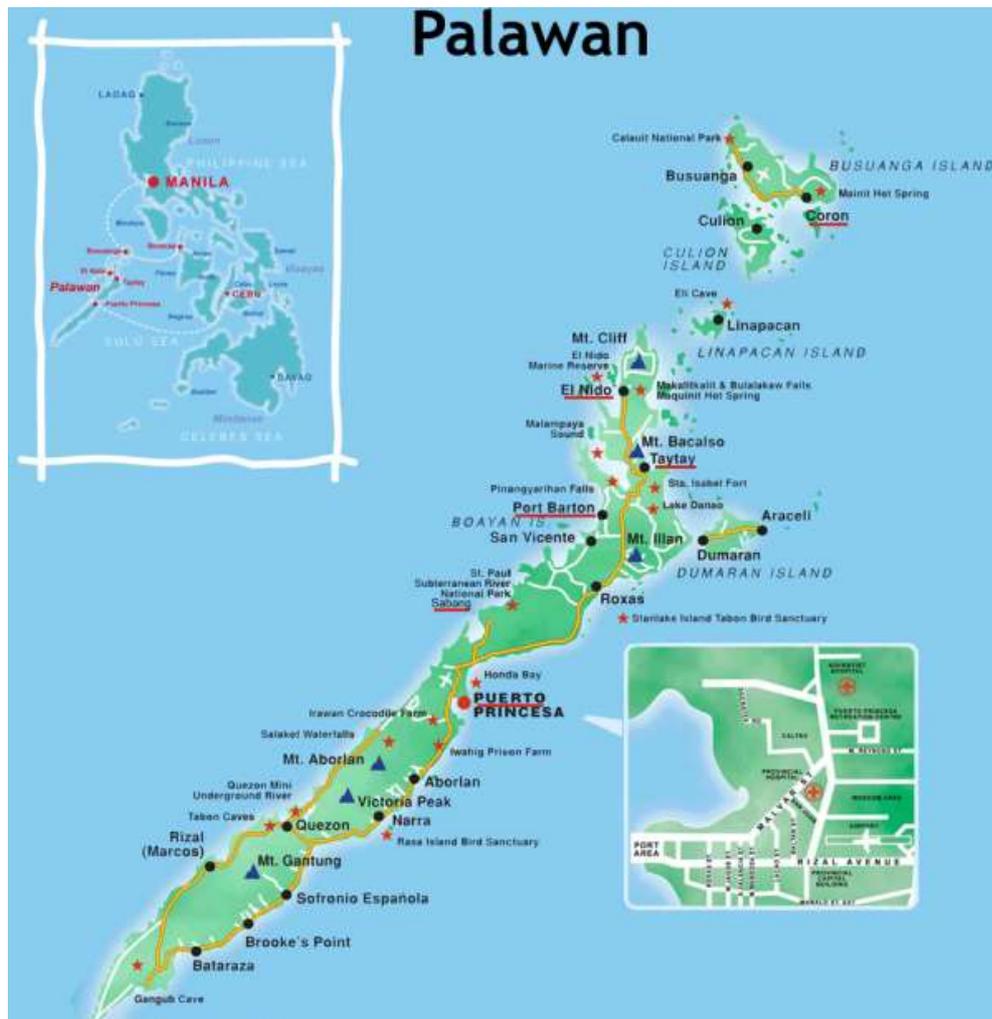
Palawan Otter Project



Background

Palawan is home to an isolated population of Asian Small-clawed Otters (*Aonyx cinereus*), it is the only known otter species in the Philippines. Locally they are known as “Dugong” or “Fisher dog” and are found mostly around mangroves, estuaries, rivers, streams, sand beaches and rice paddy fields. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has confirmed them to be “Vulnerable” due to population declines because of habitat loss and exploitation. LAMAVE will assess the population status of *A.cinereus* in Palawan using camera traps to help identify which individuals are using this important habitat and to understand the population structure in this area.

Palawan



Palawan is the western island of the Philippines, it classed as a “biodiversity hotspot” almost 25% of all the animal species that live in the Philippines live in Palawan. There are at least 450 species of butterflies, 55 of which are endemic and at least 19 endemic birds including the Palawan Peacock and Palawan Hornbill. The endemic Mouse Deer live here, which is thought to be the smallest deer in the world, as well as the Palawan Bear Cat and the endemic Palawan Bearded Pig. Puerto Princesa is the capital of Palawan and has been acclaimed several times as the cleanest and greenest city in the Philippines. There are a wide range of attractions ranging from beaches to wildlife reserves, a nature lover’s paradise.

The Work

The research team is composed of a Project leader and two or three volunteers. Volunteers are selected students, early career researchers and/or conservationists from different parts of the world.

A thorough presentation about the project, the survey activities and otter physiology and ecology will be provided on your arrival. This section provides a brief overview of the work we do, the surveys conducted depending on current research priorities, and environmental factors such as weather conditions.

Data Collection



- As this is a new project, before we can set any camera traps we must first find the otters! Surveys to find otter tracks/dens/spraints will be carried out on a daily basis. They will be land-based and boat-based. It is important that volunteers are fit enough to walk for several hours in the sun and able to carry camera equipment.
- Volunteers will be also be expected to work at night when needed as night surveys will also be carried out.
- There will be a lot of travelling involved and sometimes the volunteers will be expected to stay in some remote locations and hammocks may be necessary
- Volunteers will be expected to clean and study otter faecal samples
- LAMAVE also studies whale sharks all around the Philippines, which are known to visit Palawan in the months of April and May. During that time the project may be responsible for photo identifying the sharks, therefore there may be opportunities for volunteers to assist with this, however it is opportunistic and will depend on circumstances.

Daily Life

An example of the daily schedule:

06:00 Wake up, breakfast

06:30 Travel to survey site



07:00 Survey the transect looking for signs of the otters
13:00 Lunch
14:00 Analyze any fecal samples
15:00 Data write up
18:00 Prepare dinner
19:00 Dinner
Night surveys will be carried out as and when.

Arrival

Transport

Arrival/Manilla/Puerto Princesa

The easiest way to reach us is via Manila, with a connecting flight to Puerto Princesa. Once you arrive in Puerto Princesa you will be collected at the airport by a member of staff and taken to your accommodation.

Visas

On entering the country most visitors are allowed to stay in the country for 30 days without applying for a visa, you can also request a 59 day visa upon arrival at the immigration desk. Before the visa expires you must travel to an immigration office to renew your visa. You can do this in Puerto Princesa. To renew your visa you need to take your passport to the office and fill out a form. 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 7500PHP for the I-Card a 1-month extension. Before travelling to the Philippines is possible to obtain a 59-day visa which is slightly cheaper than getting it locally. However, the I-Card will still be required when these 59 days expire. You can also apply for a visa in your own country, which may be cheaper too.

Equipment Required

- Mosquito net
- Mosquito repellent
- Hammock
- Walking shoes/boots
- Hat
- Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts to protect you from the mosquitos
- Raincoat
- Head torch
- Waterproof watch
- Laptop
- Towel

Recommended General Packing List

- Dry bag to carry your dry clothes and electrics on the boats
- Long trousers (for formal occasions)
- Sunscreen
- Casual clothing
- Swimwear
- Mask, fins and snorkel

Project accommodation is secure and the volunteer house can be locked, however personal belongings are brought at your own risk and the project is not responsible for loss or damage to personal property during your placement.

Accommodation

The project leader and volunteers share the accommodation. The number of people per room depends on space and may be of mixed gender, there will be space to keep personal belongings in the rooms. There is a shared bathroom and kitchen with a fridge where volunteers can keep small amounts of food for personal consumption. There is a communal area which will also be used as a working space. Internet is provided in the house, however it is limited and connection can be slow, so we ask for no high data usage such as downloads/YouTube etc. If you wish, you can purchase your own dongle once you arrive. There is no smoking in the project house.



Food

Food and basic ingredients are easily available from the town markets and shops. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and small snacks for the day are provided for by the project, however other snacks and non-basic foods (e.g. chips, chocolate, sodas, cereals) are not part of the project budget. You are welcome to split specialty treats (e.g. cereals) with another member of the project. Volunteers and staff alike contribute in daily tasks i.e. cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.

Example of daily food:

- Breakfast – Toast and jam/eggs/fruit
- Lunch – Vegetable pasta/eggs on toast.
- Dinner – Chicken and vegetables with rice / fried noodles / soups
- Survey snacks – Bananas

The menu for the evening meal is decided the day before to allow time to purchase the ingredients. It is usual to take turns on the cooking.

**If you have any dietary restrictions, for example if you are a celiac, please let us know on application and we will advise you on suitable food availability.





Drinking Water

Tap water is not suitable for drinking, only for bathing and cooking. There is filtered drinking water stored in the house. Once empty, the person who places the last bottle in the dispenser is the one responsible for ordering more. See coordinator for details on how to do this.

Shower

Please be vigilant when using water, avoid prolonged showers, save water by lathering up and then rinsing. Please make sure all taps are turned off properly when not in use.

Laundry

Laundry will be done by hand, buckets are provided as is washing power. Please don't leave items to soak for extended time periods, line space is for all volunteers, therefore please remove laundry once it is dry.

General

Communications

When you arrive in the Philippines we require you to purchase a local SIM card. Cheap smartphones are also available for approximately 1500PHP. Please purchase a **GLOBE** SIM card. SIM cards are available in the malls or at the airport and bus terminal.

Medical Care

All medical services in the Philippines need to be paid for. Costs vary from PHP50 for a consultation at the local hospital to PHP8000 for a full CTI scan in the City. Volunteers that contract a contagious disease that may put other volunteers and staff at risk will be asked to leave the project house for the duration of their treatment.

Insurance

It is **mandatory** that all volunteers purchase travel/health insurance **BEFORE** joining the project and provide LAMAVE with all insurance details prior to arrival. In the event of illness or injury, the LAMAVE staff needs access to your insurance details to ensure you are provided with the appropriate medical care. Patients are not treated unless the hospital has proof of payment for services.

Community Relations

LAMAVE is recognized as a professional organization and we have a good reputation within the local community. As volunteers you will be representing the organization at any time, even after work has finished, and we are easily recognized by the community therefore you are expected to refrain from any inappropriate conduct, such as excessive drinking in public and any romantic relationships locals. We discourage volunteers from regularly joining locals for dinner, particularly on their own. During special occasions, e.g. birthdays or fiesta, the team is often invited to partake in the celebrations or join locals for dinner as a group activity. It is also prohibited to invite non-project members to the project house.





Day-off

We usually schedule one day off a week for the volunteers and you will find plenty of things to do in Puerto Princesa. Named as the city in a forest you can enjoy trips to the verdant rainforests as well as the isolated beaches and lagoons and breathtaking views for the top of a cliff or two. Below are a few suggestions:

- Explore the Underground River-This UNESCO World Heritage Site is the longest navigable underground river in the world. Here you will see stunning white beaches, amazing wildlife and verdant rainforests.
- Jump from one island to another at Honda Bay. Here you can find top beaches like Pandan, Cowry and Starfish. You can also visit Pambato reef and snorkel the reefs in this breathtaking protected area that is home to an array of fascinating marine life.
- If you fancy seeing some true Filipino culture, you can spend some time at Puerto Princesa's City attractions. Plaza Cuartel is a memorial place for all the American soldiers killed in the WW2 and you can visit the underground tunnels to the dungeons. Just outside the Plaza there is a small Catholic church and there is also a local museum where the history of the island and the different tribes is explained.
- Rizal Avenue is the main street with many shops, bars and restaurants which is fun to visit day and night.
- You can also take a free tour around the City. There is a free bus that picks up tourists in the Jollibee area and takes them around for free!

Holidays and Visitors

As a volunteer you are recruited to work for 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 we do not allow volunteers to take additional days off. If you would like any advice or recommendations on where to go and how to get there we'd be happy to share our experiences with you.

The same principal applies to friends and family visiting you during your placement. We are unable to house personal visitors in project accommodation and additional time off will not be granted.

Grounds for Dismissal

Volunteers may be asked to leave the project if they display inappropriate behavior or attitude that disrupts work, the living environment or portrays a negative image for the organization. Dismissal is at the Project leader's discretion. The use of drugs during the placement is prohibited and will result in dismissal.

If you are interested in the work we do and think you would make an enthusiastic, hardworking volunteer or if you have any further questions please feel free to email us at volunteer@lamave.org. To officially apply for a volunteer position please send



us your CV and a cover letter explaining why you would like to volunteer with us. We look forward to hearing from you!



<http://www.lamave.org>



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