



# REEF DOCTOR

RESEARCH EDUCATION  
CONSERVATION





# The ReefDoctor Research Assistant Programme Guide

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# An Introduction to the Research Assistant Programme

The ReefDoctor Research Assistant programme trains volunteers to become integral members of our marine research work and able to help us in our other marine management and conservation projects.

Research Assistants will gain professional training in scuba diving, species identification and marine habitat monitoring in order to assist ReefDoctor with its long term marine research programme. In doing so you will be directly contributing to the conservation and management of the threatened marine ecosystems in the Bay of Ranobe and the future sustainable development of the local Vezo community.



To undertake our marine research surveys all research assistants must be certified to PADI Advanced open water (or equivalent). If you have never dived before we will train you from scratch and certify you to PADI Advanced open water in the first couple of weeks of your expedition.

This programme is also a great way for graduates and undergraduates to gain the essential field based work experiences needed to help further a career in conservation and marine sciences. We can also provide the opportunity for BSc and MSc students in the field of environmental sciences and conservation to undertake their own research projects for their thesis (please ask for further details on possible research projects).

Expeditions of 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12 weeks are available.

Expeditions start every 6 weeks from January to December with spaces available for 4-6 people per expedition month.





# Who joins?

At ReefDoctor we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to volunteer. We take people from all walks of life and from all over the world, as long as they are over the age of **18**. All we ask is that you're reasonably fit and healthy; you'll need to have passed a diving medical before your arrival. (medical forms provided by ReefDoctor upon signing up for the programme).

No prior skills are required, just a general enthusiasm to learn more about the marine environment and get involved.



The Research Assistant programme is suitable for a wide range of people including:

- Those completing a gap year.
- Those who wish to learn more about coral reefs and actively participate in marine research, management and community development work
- Marine and environmental science undergraduate and graduate students who wish to gain practical field based experience required for their studies (includes Bsc. and Msc. thesis projects) and for their future careers.
- Those who are on sabbatical leave.
- Those who are looking for a new career path.

A good volunteer to staff ratio ensures that our staff are able to devote more time to you and allows you to get the maximum possible out of your stay.



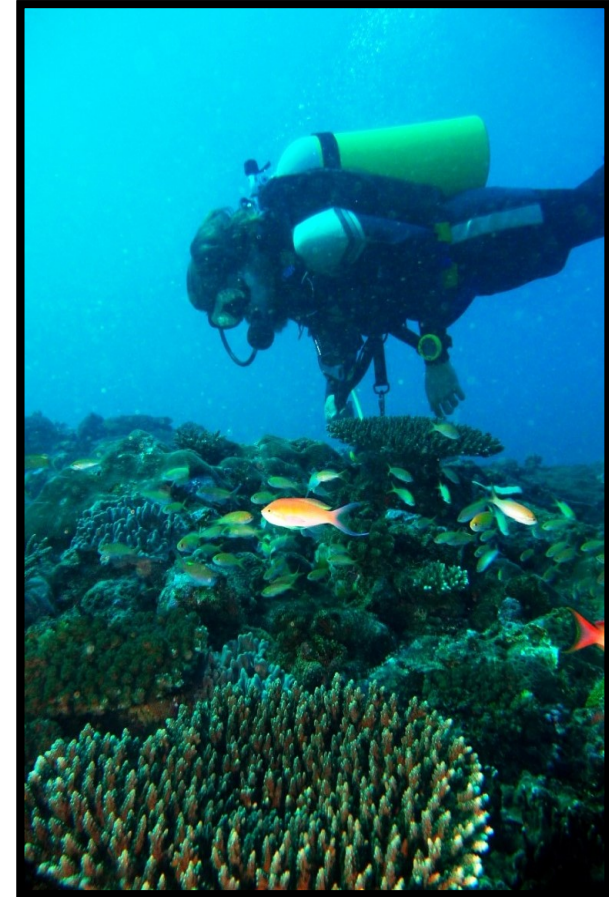
# Research Assistant Training

Upon arrival your initial training includes a short spell to get used to the life here. A background to Madagascar, its culture and its customs, particularly the local fishing communities we work with. In addition, you will receive an orientation trip of the local village of Ifaty, and an introduction to the work of ReefDoctor and it's project site.

The core diving and science training usually covers the first 4 weeks of the expedition to the level we call 'Indicator', though training is always ongoing throughout the expedition especially for those wishing to progress to more advanced levels; As we say the more you put in the more you get out!

The time taken to complete the core diving and science training will depend on the weather, dive training progression, number of other volunteers on site, progression of the individual in the science and the occurrence of any external events and projects that may require volunteer participation.

The length of your expedition determines the level of scientific training you receive. All Research Assistants will be trained to an intermediate (indicator) level but those staying for 8 weeks or more (or any fast learners!) will have the opportunity to learn the expert level training, though all surveys are performed under the indicator level.





# Dive Training

## **PADI Open Water training schedule:**

- Open Water Book Work/Knowledge Reviews (x 5)/Quizzes (x 4)/Exam (x 1)
- Confined Water Dives (Hotel Nautilus or Bamboo Club Pool)
- Confined Water Dive (lagoon dive)
- Open Water Dives x 4

We hope to complete your open water in the first week though this does depend on how quickly you complete the skills and exams, open water dives and the weather, number of volunteers etc. The advanced course training will start at the end of this first week continuing into the 2nd week.



## **PADI Advanced Open Water Course training schedule:**

- Adventures in Diving Book Work/Knowledge Reviews (x 5)
- Checkout Dive (If Open Water Diver certification received outside of ReefDoctor)
- Naturalist Dive
- Peak Performance Buoyancy Dive
- Navigation Dive
- Search and Recovery Dive
- Deep Dive
- Proficiency Dive(s) (Proficiency before certification)



**For 8 weeks + expeditions, volunteers may also undertake the PADI Rescue Diver certification (includes the PADI EFR 1<sup>st</sup> aid course) for an additional fee.**





# Science Training

Research Assistants will receive lectures on the following during the core science training:

- Introduction to ReefDoctor's Research, Conservation and Management Programmes.
- Introduction to Coral Reefs.
- Introduction to Scientific Diving.
- A series of Marine Species Identification lectures. The Research Assistant programme trains you in the underwater identification of commercially important reef species (fish and invertebrates), coral reef health indicator species (fish and invertebrates) and benthic substrata, this training ranges from indicator to expert level.
- Marine habitat surveying techniques (Benthic PIT, Invert Belt, Fish Belt).
- Fish length and biomass estimate training



The science training commences from the start of dive certification to PADI Advanced level (or straight away for those already qualified). It begins on land (with computer and literature based learning) and, as your identification skills develop, you'll go on snorkel and scuba trips with ReefDoctor's science staff to practise species recognition and coral reef surveying techniques.

All volunteers will be given marine identification and survey methods study guides a month (or earlier if you wish) before they leave home. This allows learning to begin in advance of the expedition in order to speed up the progression of training on site and maximizing time spent as qualified reef surveyors!

Research Assistants **must** pass computer based species identification exams and assessed underwater surveys 'mimic survey dives' before they can take part in ReefDoctor's surveying programme, this ensures that we are collecting scientifically accurate data for our long term research goals.



# Following your training.....

- Participate in ReefDoctors long term coral reef monitoring programme: you will become a vital member of our surveying team. The role you will play (either fish, invertebrate or benthic surveyor) will rotate as you gain experience.
- Research Assistants undertake regular diving (weather dependent), though this is only one aspect of our work.
- Fun dives every Saturday.
- Night dives can also be arranged along with other specialty dives (e.g. deep dive) though these do come at an extra cost (please ask for details).
- You will be trained in ecological data entry and be responsible for logging the data you collect on to our database.
- You will also have the opportunity to assist the ReefDoctor team in their core research, management and conservation projects such as;
  - Monitoring and maintenance work in the coral nursery and reef transplants
  - Participate in local community aquaculture initiatives e.g. help maintain algal farms
  - Fisheries catch monitoring alongside the local fisheries team.
  - RD kids club with environmental education etc..
- Learn the local language through our weekly Malagasy classes (French classes also available weekly)

Further information to this can be found in the programme schedule provided upon application.







# Following your training.....

Becoming a ReefDoctor Research Assistant means the more you put in the more you get out so we want you to use your enthusiasm, experiences and qualifications to become involved in our projects. This may include other projects outside the marine research programme such as marine management (e.g. you can help with the monitoring of local fishermen's catches and/or participate in our coral gardening project), education (e.g. environmental education in our kids club) or community development (e.g. working with our alternative aquaculture livelihoods programme such as algal farming).

The longer you stay for the more you can achieve!





# Daily Life

Our working week runs from Monday to Friday. Fun dives occur on Saturdays, and Sunday is a non diving day.

The working day can start early (between 5-7 am) because we are dependant on the tides for taking the dive boat out, typically diving occurs in the morning and then again in the afternoon. We break for lunch at noon, after which we take a break for the hottest time of the day. We start again at 1.30pm with land based project work or diving.



Our days finish at around 5pm. Dinner is at 6:00pm before the sun sets – a sight that'll have you running for your camera every night and then it's time to rest and relax. Some nights you'll want the early night but on others you might wander in to the village for music and dancing.

Diving, work, and play are our main mainstays. Our schedules have plenty of time for work, fun and relaxation. After all there is no point visiting such a unique place as Madagascar without taking some time to enjoy it!

At the weekends you are free to do as you wish; simply relax in the peaceful surroundings on site, go to Toliara for shopping, walk to the popular beach resort of Mangily, visit local parks or take a long weekend to go further afield in order to visit one of the national parks (park visits are an extra cost covered by volunteers).





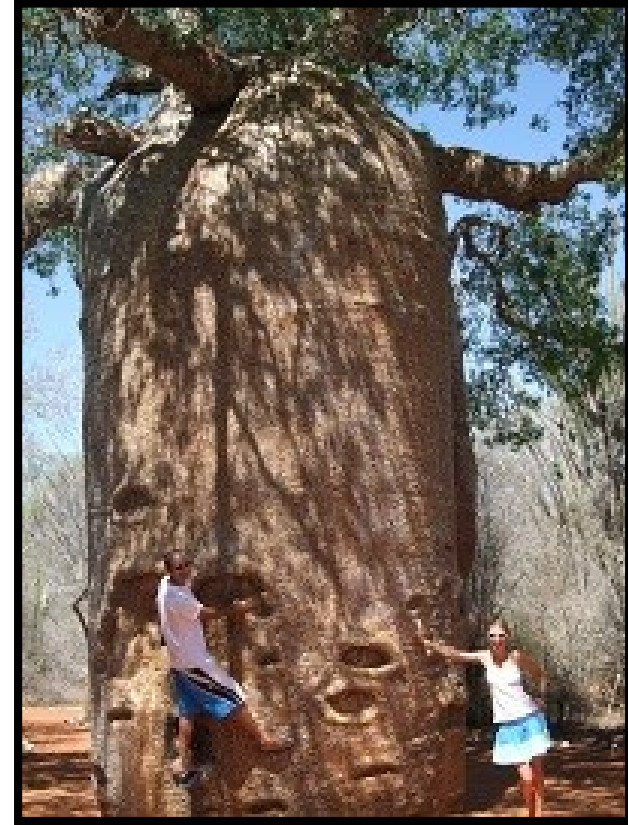


# Local Area

We work in the Bay of Ranobe, South West Madagascar. The bay is protected from the open ocean by an extensive fringing/barrier reef system creating a shallow lagoon, 28km long by 8km wide, containing a series of patch reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves. The ReefDoctor site is located on the periphery of Ifaty village in the south of the Bay, 27km north of the main provincial town of Toliara. This is a small and traditional Malagasy fishing village; there is no mains electricity or running water, and life there is very basic.



Behind Ifaty village is the spiny forest, considered one of the most endangered habitats worldwide. The flora of our region consists of dry weather plants such as cacti, shrubs, baobab trees, tamarind trees and the infamous octopus tree. The white sandy beach outside the ReefDoctor site stretches northwards for miles. After an hour's walk you'll reach the main tourist destination for the region, Mangily.





# ReefDoctor Project Site

The ReefDoctor project site is made up of two sites both situated on a white sandy beach with beautiful views of the Bay of Ranobe. The first and main site is called the RD compound. The enclosed compound is made up of one main house, 8 brick bungalows, 8 volunteer interconnected single huts, a dormitory, kitchen area, dive shop and utility room for the dive compressor and generator. The main house/office is used as the main work area for all volunteers. A generator along with solar panels and a wind turbine provides electricity for the compressor, pumping water to the house and bungalows, lighting, charging appliances and computer/internet use. Next door to this compound is the land of the University of Toliara. Here there are 3 interconnected single huts (sleeping 6 people in total) and 2 double huts ideal for couples. This is usually the main staff and intern accommodation.

Volunteers sleep in the huts in the compound or in the dormitory. All huts are made of local sourced materials built from wood, reeds and reed roof with cement floor. The dormitory hut has dividers for privacy and plenty of windows for staying cool. Showers are taken in two enclosed wood shower stalls using water from the well. There are two wood toilet stalls housing hygienic drop toilets. For an additional cost (£200 per month, £6.66 a day), volunteers may upgrade to one of the beach front brick bungalows complete with en suite shower and toilet.

All of our meals are lovingly cooked by our chef Victor who serve up a unique mix of Western/Malagasy cuisine, which consists of the staple Malagasy diet of rice and beans, fresh vegetables, fish, meat, and fruit. Coffee is brewed every morning along with hot water for tea and the local traditional rice tea is served with each meal. Our drinking water is locally sourced and treated on site.







# Camp Safety

Ensuring your safety at ReefDoctor is our top priority. There have been no serious incidents at ReefDoctor during the 12 years it has been operating in Madagascar. Whilst our project site is in a semi-remote location, hospital care is readily available in Toliara which can be accessed within an hour. We focus heavily on accident prevention; providing safety information, training and advice to all volunteers and staff when they arrive.

We have conducted a full risk assessment of our Ifaty campsite and created rules and procedures designed to promote safety and good hygiene in all aspects of our daily life. Due to our semi-remote location we have easy access to the medical care available in Mangily and Toliara. We keep 1<sup>st</sup> aid medical supplies on site and all of our staff are trained in the provision of emergency first aid.

Due to our semi-remote location we have introduced a series of safety procedures designed to minimise risk at all times. All of our diving is run under the strict guidelines laid down by PADI International with additional rules and regulations created by us for operating in our area. All rules and regulations are enforced at all times by the dive officers and boat captains. A copy of our dive regulations is given to each person entering the ReefDoctor camp, and training in our emergency procedures is completed before working diving commences. All scuba regulators are serviced annually in the UK. Our dive tanks are inspected by qualified staff on site using the best visual inspection equipment available, we are the only NGO in Madagascar with this equipment. Oxygen and first aid equipment is taken on every dive with emergency drill practices conducted monthly for staff and volunteers. We keep a 75L and 15L oxygen cylinder on camp and have two 5L tanks for use on our dive boats.

ReefDoctor's buildings and facilities are enclosed within a secure compound which is guarded at night by three local security personnel.

Working in a remote location means that we need to ensure that when help is needed we can contact the right people quickly. For communications we keep the following charged and ready for emergency use at all times:

- VHF radios, one base station in camp and one on each dive boat;
- two mobile phones, one in camp and one in each boat;
- Emergency 1<sup>st</sup> aid materials, (neck and leg braces, spine board, bandages etc.,).

For our emergency plan and evacuation procedures, we liaise with the Divers Alert Network (DAN) in Europe and South Africa. Our evacuation plan is reviewed monthly to ensure that information is correct and training is up-to-date. All volunteers and staff receive training on the plan on arrival.





# Ifaty Seasons



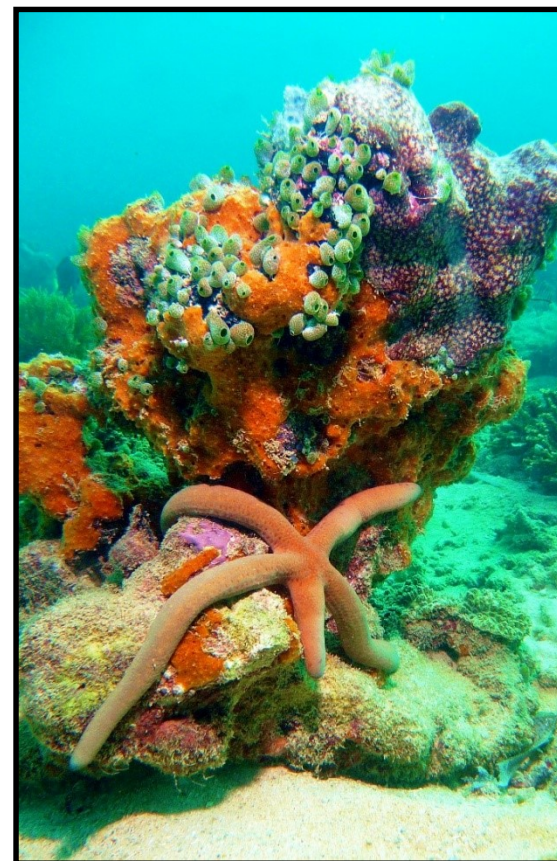
Month	Season (according to European seasons)	Risk of Malaria	Average Temp. C Day	Average Temp. C Night
January	Summer (cyclone)	High	36	33
February	Summer	High	40	35
March	Summer	High	38	30
April	Autumn	Medium	35	28
May	Autumn	Medium	30	20
June *	Winter	Low	26	17
July *	Winter	Low	23	15
August *	Winter	Low	23	15
September	Spring	Low	25	20
October	Spring	Low	25	25
November	Spring	Medium	30	28
December **	Summer (cyclone)	Medium	32	28

\* Flight discounts    \*\* Diving discounts



## Expedition start dates

Unqualified divers	PADI Open Water and Advanced (or equivalent) qualified divers
10 <sup>th</sup> Jan	18 <sup>th</sup> Jan
26 <sup>th</sup> Feb	5 <sup>th</sup> March
14 <sup>th</sup> April	21 <sup>st</sup> April
7 <sup>th</sup> June	14 <sup>th</sup> June
21 <sup>st</sup> July	28 <sup>th</sup> July
1 <sup>st</sup> Sept	8 <sup>th</sup> Sept
16 <sup>th</sup> Oct	23 <sup>rd</sup> Oct
1 <sup>st</sup> Dec	8 <sup>th</sup> Dec



**N.B.** These dates are when you need to arrive on site in Ifaty, please allow extra time to get here (depending on flight times 1-2 days, from the capital Antananarivo)





# Research Assistant Programme Fees

Duration	Non-certified divers	Open Water certified	Advanced certified
6 weeks	£1,800	£1,700	£1,600
8 weeks	£2,200	£2,100	£2,000
12 weeks	£2,600	£2,500	£2,400

N.B - £300/wk for 6 weeks, £275/wk up to 8 weeks, and only £217/wk for stays up to the full 12 week expedition so the longer you stay the cheaper each week gets!!

7, 9, 10, and 11 week expeditions are also on offer, prices can be given upon request.

PADI Rescue diver and EFR (1<sup>st</sup> aid) certification costs £250 extra for all those wishing to do this and staying for 8+ weeks.

**Special rates for joining in December (windy season):**

Duration	Non-certified divers	Open Water certified	Advanced certified
6 weeks	£1,600	£1,500	£1,400
8 weeks	£2,000	£1,900	£1,800
12 weeks	£2,400	£2,300	£2,200

**10% discount on all expeditions joining between June-August if your flight is over £1,200**

**15% discount on 12 week expeditions joining between June-August if your flight is over £1,200.**



## Services included in these expedition costs:

- Airport pick-up in Toliara and transport to the ReefDoctor site in Ifaty
- Arrangement of hotel in the capital city Antananarivo, if required, includes free pick up by hotel from airport.
- All meals, Monday-Sunday.
- Filtered water, coffee and tea and access to cooking stove and oven
- Lodging: with bed sheets, pillows and mosquito net provided.
- First-aid medical care.
- Electricity for charging cell phones, laptops, etc. and limited internet connection.
- Dive training: PADI Open Water and Advanced dive certification included in the costs for all expeditions.
- Project equipment and educational materials: dive slates, paper, pens etc., all required for your working activities.
- Dive equipment, including: Buoyancy Control Device (BCD), full regulator set, weights and tanks.
- Occasional excursions to help some of our conservation partners in the area, such as HONCO (mangrove conservation and re-plantation).
- Science training: level of training will vary according to the expedition duration, dive certification and progression of the individual.
- Pre-departure support and pre-departure guides: advice on flights, equipment, Madagascar, medicals, vaccines, insurance etc.
- UK based support/communication throughout the expedition for the volunteers' friends and family.
- Fuel, equipment and staff (international and local) to make this all happen!

**NB – You financial contribution not only goes to your living and work needs with us but also goes towards the other projects and local staff we employ to undertake the conservation work we do.**

## Services NOT included in the expedition costs:

- Round-trip airfare and visa.
- Diving, travel and medical insurance and cost of vaccines.
- Filling in the ReefDoctor standard recreational dive medicals (forms provided by us to be filled in by a medical professional which they can charge you to fill in so try your family doctor who should do this for free).
- PADI dive instruction manuals and PIC cards: all participants in the dive training courses **MUST** purchase their own manuals, as per PADI International Rulings May 2006, and bring these materials with you. PADI PIC-cards are required to process each level of all PADI courses we offer – For all volunteers doing these courses PIC cards cost of £30 (33 Euros) per course and £18 (20euros) for the EFR 1<sup>st</sup> aid course. Costs will be added to your expedition invoice.
- All volunteers must bring their own wetsuit, mask/snorkel, fins and booties, time piece and/or dive computer, weight belt.
- Costs any personal excursions (often groups of volunteers plan excursions to nearby national parks or other areas of interest).
- Anti-malaria drugs.
- Extra PADI dive courses (night dives, deep dive)

Further rundown of the additional costs will be provided upon application.





# Why choose ReefDoctor?



- Up to 98% of your expedition cost goes directly into our conservation work and the local economy.
- Our core staff are professionals in their respective fields, their knowledge and experience will be passed on to you throughout your ReefDoctor training.
- Malagasy culture is vibrant and memorable. During your stay you'll experience it first hand; through getting to know ReefDoctor's local Malagasy staff members, visits to Ifaty village, visiting surrounding areas to participating in our other education, research and development projects.
- A ReefDoctor expedition attracts people from all walks of life and all over the world, you will make new friends with whom you will share memorable life experiences.
- Our work is part of a larger, global effort. It helps develop understanding of marine resource management in developing countries and contributes scientific information to a much wider conservation community.
- Our programmes are designed with the community at their heart; our work is directed at helping local communities develop and grow while conserving their unique resources. A ReefDoctor expedition is all about making a difference and you'll be contributing to helping us fulfil our long term ecological and social objectives in the Bay of Ranobe.
- As a ReefDoctor volunteer you'll learn new skills, walk away with new experiences and a whole new level of scientific knowledge and ultimately you'll have contributed to helping protect threatened marine ecosystems and the future livelihoods of the Vezo people.



**To apply for the Research Assistant programme please visit our website**

**[www.reefdoctor.org/apply-now/](http://www.reefdoctor.org/apply-now/)**

For further information or any questions:

- Email: [volunteer@reefdoctor.org](mailto:volunteer@reefdoctor.org)
- speak directly someone from our UK headquarters:  
+44 (0)7866250740
- Skype username: reefdoctor







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