



REEF DOCTOR

CREATING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



VOLUNTEER FAQ'S



FAQ's

Who can volunteer?

Our volunteer programmes are open to anyone over the age of 18, providing they are in a reasonable state of fitness and can speak English. Volunteers will need to complete medical forms signed by a doctor prior to departure (medical forms will be provided by Reef Doctor upon application).

How do I become a volunteer?

Simply complete our volunteer questionnaire on the 'Apply Now' section of our website, return it to volunteer@reefdoctor.org, and a member of staff will contact you in response to your application.

Do I need to be a qualified scuba diver?

No. 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.

When can I come?

This depends on the type of volunteer/intern programme you are joining. Please see the Expedition Start Date tables on the relevant website programme pages and in our programme guides.

If I cancel the expedition will I lose all my money?

Reef Doctor asks for £500 deposit to be paid upon signing up to an expedition, this deposit is non-refundable in all circumstances. However, if you pull out but still wish to come at a later date, having paid the deposit, it will be honoured and you will just have to pay the remaining expedition fee. To ensure volunteers are happy with joining us and to safe guard your money, Reef Doctor will ask for the final payment 30 days before your expedition start date. If you pay the final balance before this and/or at the requested time but pull out then your money will not be refunded. Volunteers who pull out, having paid the full amount, and cannot join due to exceptional circumstances will be considered for a refund on a case-by-case basis.



When is the best time to come?

Madagascar has two main seasonal variations. The hot and wet season (October to March) makes for pleasant diving conditions but perhaps not favourable for those who cannot tolerate the heat. In the southwest of Madagascar the wet season typically only consists of around one weeks' worth of rain, in comparison with the considerably wetter northern part of the country. Throughout December and January it is the cyclone season, this produces windy conditions which may affect the diving schedule at times and reduce diving visibility. The dry season (April to October) is slightly cooler and you will most definitely require a full wetsuit during this time. Humpback Whale season also starts in July through to October so this a great time to come as we often see whales when out diving on the exterior of the bay, or we can organise whale watching excursions for you.

Month	Season (according to European seasons)	Malaria Risk	Average Day Temp °C	Average Night Temp °C
January	Summer (cyclones)	High	36	33
February	Summer (cyclones)	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	Medium	32	28

Are there any additional costs I need to know about on top of the Reef Doctor Expedition and programme fees?

Yes, there are several costs such as your return flights, insurance, vaccines, anti-malarial drugs, PADI course materials, PADI certification fee, basic dive gear, and spending money etc. Further details can be provided upon request.



How much money do I need to take with me?

Additional money you will need during your time with us, in general, is small. There is little opportunity to spend money on site, expect for the occasional snacks or drinks you may wish to purchase from Ifaty village. The only major additional spending money you will need will be to cover excursions, should you wish to take any, to see some of the surrounding area such as spending the occasional weekend in Mangily and Toliara, or travelling a little further afield to some of the regional National Parks. Travelling in Madagascar is never too expensive and we can help you organise the cheapest options. In general, we suggest you budget for roughly around 85 Euros per month (this is an average; it varies greatly between individuals) for your time with us.

Do I need insurance?

All volunteers and interns must have two forms of insurance, basic travel insurance and specific diving insurance. We **strongly recommend** that you take out Divers Alert Network (DAN) insurance to cover your diving activities.

Do I need a Visa?

You will need to get a standard 'Tourist Visa' to cover all expeditions between 3–12 weeks. Visas for a maximum of 30 days (i.e., 3 week expeditions only) cost around 20 Euros, a 60 day visa costs 30 Euros, while a 90 day visa costs 45 Euros. The best way is to buy this on arrival at Antananarivo international airport (cash only, they will take dollars/euros). You **MUST** have a return airline ticket as they will not let you into the country on a single ticket. Interns over 12 weeks will require a working visa which Reef Doctor will arrange for you.

Do I need my own diving equipment?

For all EcoDivers and Research Assistants, we will provide you with the BCD (buoyancy control device), full regulator set, scuba tanks, and weights. You will have to bring your own mask, snorkel, fins (booty fins), wetsuit, dive slate and a dive watch or, preferably, a dive computer. All Divemaster Interns must bring their own BCD and full regulator set in addition to the rest of the equipment stated above. In addition, all volunteers (except Research and Divemaster Interns) must purchase and bring with them the PADI dive instruction manuals and PADI PIC (certification) cards, as per PADI International Rulings May 2006. PADI PIC-cards are required to process each level of all PADI courses we offer - PIC card costs are added to volunteer programme invoices: £35 (~40 Euros) per PADI course and £20 (~26 Euros) for the EFR 1st aid.



What if I have diving accreditation through BSAC, NAUI, or another diving organisation?

All Reef Doctor Research Assistants must be trained up to Advanced Open Water (PADI) or equivalent to undertake the survey work. Have a look at the following website to see where your certification falls in line with PADI:

<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/training/qualifications.html>

What does the science training consist of?

The level of training we provide ranges from basic to advanced depending on the type of volunteer programme you join (and individual competencies). Reef Doctor EcoDivers will begin training in basic marine science and species identification during the 2nd week of an expedition. Reef Doctor Research Assistants undertake an intensive marine science training (basic to a more advanced level) period in the first few weeks of an expedition (though training is always ongoing throughout the expedition). Reef Doctor provides lectures on marine biology, ecology, species identification and surveying techniques. You will complete species identification and practice survey dives with Reef Doctor's science officers and interns. In order to take part in Reef Doctor's coral reef monitoring programme, research assistants are required to pass tests (computer and scuba based). These tests are to ensure that the data you will collect on surveys is of sufficient scientific standard. You will be given species identification and study guides no less than one month before leaving home so that you can start learning, therefore maximising your time with us. Intern training is more intensive and in depth, please refer to the individual programme guides for further information.

How do I get there?

There are regular direct flights to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar from Paris, Milan, Bangkok, Johannesburg, Nairobi, and Mauritius. We recommend comparing prices between the main airlines; Air France, Air Madagascar, Air Kenya (this one tend to give the best deals), Turkish Airlines, and Air Seychelles. Our partner Student Universe, has a specialist team set up for Reef Doctor volunteers who can find you the best possible quote for your flight and help with your travel bookings. For more information please see our flight guide on our volunteer downloads webpage.

When I get there how do I get to the Reef Doctor project site?

Reef Doctor staff cannot meet you at the airport in Antananarivo but we can arrange a hotel that can pick you up at the airport if you cannot get a connecting flight to Toliara that day. There is usually one flight a day to Toliara, the regional capital for the south west of Madagascar and the nearest city to our site. All domestic flights are serviced by Air Madagascar and Madagasikara Airways. You can visit their websites to book your connecting flight to Toliara from the capital or ask your travel agent (or our agent, Student Universe) to do this.



Upon arrival to Toliara airport you will be collected by Taxi (the driver is well known by Reef Doctor) and taken to the centre of town (taxi fare will be covered by Reef Doctor). The taxi driver will have a sign with your name on it and you cannot miss him as the airport is very small. If you arrive to Toliara in the afternoon (from 3 pm onwards) you will have to stay overnight in Toliara (room, food has to be covered by the volunteer). Reef Doctor will arrange the hotel booking and have the taxi take you there. A Reef Doctor staff member will then collect you from the hotel the next day to take you to Ifaty. If you arrive in the morning or early afternoon (up to 3 pm) the taxi will take you to the centre of town to the where you will be met by a Reef Doctor staff member and they will take you to our site in Ifaty by taxi bus.

How safe is travelling in Madagascar?

Madagascar is a safe country to travel in providing you practice the same laws of common sense necessary when travelling in any developing country. In general, we recommend not to travel around at night alone and when travelling by public taxi bus not to travel overnight (as roads are not in the best condition) and to break up the journey. Reef Doctor will advise you on safe travelling should you wish to explore more of the country.

How can keep in touch with friends and family whilst at Reef Doctor?

The easiest way to do this is via mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card and/or phone at a very cheap price (2 Euros SIM card and 10 Euros for a phone). Mobile phone reception is very good at our project site and we also have WIFI. The internet is predominately for work purposes but volunteers can access it for personal use during lunch breaks mid-week. We also have a 24-hour telephone messaging service in case of emergency, enabling good UK-based communication support for any family members that require updates on the volunteer.

How does Reef Doctor ensure the safety of its volunteers?

At Reef Doctor your safety is our top priority. Our expedition camp is in a semi-remote location therefore we have rigorous safety procedures in place. We focus heavily on accident prevention; providing safety information, training and advice to all volunteers and staff when they arrive. Whilst our project site is in a semi-remote location, hospital care is readily available in Toliara which is accessible within an hour. There have been no serious incidents at Reef Doctor during the 13 years it has been operating a volunteer programme in Madagascar

What happens in an emergency?

In the event of an emergency, Reef Doctor has prearranged emergency and evacuation procedures. We liaise with the Divers Alert Network (DAN) in Europe and South Africa and review them monthly to ensure that information is correct and training is up-to-date. All volunteers and staff receive training with the plans on arrival. These plans can be put into action at a moment's notice and the Project Manager/In-country Director is in 24 hour contact with the London office. If you would like to see any of these protocols please contact us at volunteer@reefdoctor.org.



What vaccinations will I need when visiting Madagascar?

Madagascar is affected by a number of tropical diseases and you should see your doctor or an accredited Travel Clinic who will advise you on the relevant inoculations necessary for visiting the country. You must get the following vaccinations before entering the country as advised by the World Health Organisation:

- Hepatitis A and B
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- In addition, some health care professionals may also recommend the following:
- Polio, and BCG (Tuberculosis)
- Diphtheria
- Meningitis (A & C)
- Rabies

Do I need to take anti-malaria medication?

Yes. Anti-Malaria medication needs to be started before departure and volunteers must ensure they bring enough medication to last the duration of their stay in Madagascar. Lariam (Mefloquine) is **not** recommended whilst conducting regular scuba diving activities (UK HSE Medical Advisory Service). There are other malarial prophylactics options which your doctor or travel clinic can advise you on.

How can I find out more about Madagascar?

Please see the Volunteer Resources document on our volunteer downloads webpage for links to a wealth of information on travelling in Madagascar.





Contact Details

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information:

Email: reefdoctormada@gmail.com

Tel: +44 (0)7866 250740 (mobile)

Tel: +44 (0)1756 380198 (landline)

Skype: reefdoctor

