

Sea Turtle Conservation and Scuba Diving Program Details

Love sea turtles? So do we! Join us to protect endangered sea turtles and dive the Belize Barrier Reef! Not a certified scuba diver? No worries, get your PADI scuba certification with us on the island.

Highlights

- Rescue sea turtle hatchlings and ensure their safe release into the ocean
 - Identify and monitor sea turtle nests during the nesting season, ensuring protection from human interference, predators, and environmental hazards
 - Learn all about endangered sea turtles through our educational program and hands-on participation in nest monitoring and building
 - Collect data on nesting patterns, hatchling survival rates, and threats to sea turtles to inform conservation strategies
 - Scuba dive the Belize Barrier Reef or get your scuba certification with us on the island!
-

Especially Good For

- Age 13 +
 - Singles
 - Couples
 - Families
 - Groups
 - 50+
-

Program Overview

Our sea turtle conservation program is a dedicated initiative aimed at protecting endangered sea turtles on our island in Belize. With a focus on conservation, the program seeks to preserve the fragile ecosystem that supports these sea turtles while raising awareness about their critical role in marine biodiversity.

How Can I Help?

Our volunteers are crucial to our mission! Our volunteers help to conserve and protect critically endangered sea turtles through conservation efforts, nest monitoring, safe releases, and habitat protection. By safeguarding nesting sites and ensuring successful hatchling survival, you can contribute to the recovery of endangered sea turtle populations while fostering long-term sustainability. Be the change you wish to see in the world!

What Will I Do?

- **Nest Monitoring & Protection:** Identify and monitor sea turtle nests during the nesting season, ensuring protection from human interference, predators, and environmental hazards
- **Rescue Hatchlings:** Rescue sea turtle hatchlings and ensure their safe release into the ocean

- **Data Collection:** Collect data on nesting patterns, hatchling survival rates, and threats to sea turtles to inform conservation strategies and contribute to global conservation knowledge
 - **Habitat Restoration:** Implement beach cleanup initiatives, vegetation control, and habitat enhancement projects to maintain safe and suitable nesting grounds for turtles
 - **Education:** Learn all about endangered sea turtles through our educational program and hands-on participation in nest monitoring and building
-

Program Yearly Timeline and Availability

Our program follows the ebbs and flows of the sea turtle life cycle. Sea turtle activities occur April through November in Belize. Nesting and hatching seasons are well defined and only occur during certain time periods of the year. Annually on our island on the Belize Barrier Reef we average 10 nesting sites with an average of 100-120 eggs per nest; resulting in 1200 sea turtles hatched and released from our island per year!! We couldn't do it without the help of our volunteers!!

- **Preparing Turtle Nesting Sites | April - May**

In human occupied islands and beaches, ground is often packed down and unsuitable for nesting, volunteers play a vital role in creating safe spaces for sea turtles to lay their eggs. This hands-on conservation effort involves preparing turtle nesting sites by digging out areas to a depth of about two feet. Volunteers carefully clear away roots, rocks, and other obstructions, ensuring that the site is free from debris that could interfere with nesting.

To provide the soft sand that turtles prefer, volunteers also collect sand from the shallow waters surrounding the island. This sand is sifted and added to the nesting site, creating a loose, soft substrate that mimics the turtles' natural nesting conditions. These collective efforts by dedicated volunteers are essential for ensuring the turtles can safely nest, contributing to the success of sea turtle conservation in the region.

- **Turtle Patrol and Nesting Data Collection | May - September**

Volunteers on "turtle patrol" play a crucial role in the conservation efforts on our Caribbean island in Belize, keeping watch during the night hours for the arrival of nesting sea turtles. As these creatures approach the island to lay their eggs, the volunteers remain vigilant, monitoring the shoreline for any signs of movement. Once a mother turtle comes ashore, the volunteers promptly notify the managers or program staff, who then follow established protocols to ensure the process is carried out safely and efficiently.

As the turtle lays her eggs, volunteers carefully count the number of eggs, recording this vital data. They also collect key information about the mother turtle herself, such as her size, the number of barnacles on her shell, the pattern of their distribution, and her behavior throughout the nesting process. These data points are essential for tracking the health and habits of the turtle population.

This information is compared with previous years' data on nesting turtles, helping our conservation team monitor trends, understand turtle behaviors, and assess the success of ongoing conservation efforts.

Turtle patrol is vital to protecting these endangered creatures and ensuring the long-term success of nesting sea turtles on the island.

- **Hatchling Patrol and Data Collection | July - November**

Volunteers on Hatchling Patrol dedicate themselves to monitoring sea turtle nests day and night, ensuring the safe journey of baby turtles from nest to ocean. As the hatching event approaches, volunteers set up protective netting around the nests. This enclosure is designed to contain the eruption of baby turtles as they emerge and prevent them from getting stuck in tree roots, rocks, or other obstacles on their path to the water.

During a hatching event, all power on the island is shut down to minimize distractions and ensure the turtles follow their natural instincts toward the sea. This critical phase gives the hatchlings a chance to "warm up" by walking across the sand before entering the water, which helps prepare them for the challenges ahead. Volunteers assist by gently guiding hatchlings that stray off course, ensuring they safely make their way to the ocean. As the turtles enter the water, they are carefully counted, collecting valuable data for the conservation program.

For a special memory, volunteers also have the incredible opportunity to hold a baby turtle and take a photo—with gloves on to ensure no harmful substances are transmitted to the turtle or the volunteer. Watching these tiny creatures take their first steps toward the ocean is a truly inspiring and unforgettable experience. Volunteers witness the start of their long journey, knowing that their efforts are making a real difference in the survival of these endangered species.

- **Beach Cleanups | All Year**

Beach cleanups are an essential part of the turtle conservation program on Tom Owen's Caye. Volunteers work together to remove debris, plastics, and other harmful waste from the shoreline, creating a cleaner, safer environment for nesting sea turtles. By clearing the beaches of obstacles, hatchlings have an unobstructed path to the ocean, and nesting sites are kept free of harmful materials that could disrupt the nesting process. These cleanups help preserve the natural habitat, ensuring that both adult turtles and their hatchlings can thrive in a healthy ecosystem.

Scuba Certification Required to Participate!

In order to participate in our program, one must be a certified scuba diver. Not certified? No worries, many of our volunteers come to the island to learn to dive. Looking to further your dive credentials? Many of our volunteers come to our island to further their diving certification status. Regardless of your diving level, our island is a wonderful place to learn with calm, clear waters and little current. Our volunteer trips are for both non-experienced and experienced divers - all levels of divers are welcomed.

PADI scuba certification with us on the island is an easy 2 step process.

- **Step 1:** Complete the online theory portion of your open water certification course through the PADI online eLearning at home before arrival (cost is 250 USD and paid to PADI via a web link we will send you).
- **Step 2:** Once on the ReefCI island, you will finish off the actual in-water portion of your open water certification course. We charge 295 USD to complete the in-water training portion of your course.