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VOLUNTEER INFO PACKAGE

Welcome to MCP and thank you!

We are very happy you have chosen to volunteer with us and we look tremendously forward to your stay. It really means the world to us that you have chosen to use your time and resources to help protect an environment and help people so far from your home. Without your help, we could do nothing, and our goal of improving food security for local communities would be even more of a challenge. So, very sincerely, thank you!

To help prepare you for your time with us, we have compiled a small intro package for you to look through. It should give you an idea of what to expect and provides you with the opportunity to get a head start on some of the training you will need.

We look tremendously forward to working with you and sharing with you our passion for preserving the remarkable biodiversity of the Philippines. With gratitude, the whole MCP team.

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FLIGHTS AND VISAS

Most international volunteers may enter and stay in the Philippines for 30 days without having to apply for a visa in advance. You must however have **a valid ticket for your return journey** out of the Philippines, and your passports must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the intended period of stay. At the moment of writing, this holds true for Australia, Canada, USA, all of the UK, all countries in Scandinavia, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Spain, New Zealand and many more, but as the Philippine immigration may change their policies from time to time, we encourage you to check on the webpage of the Bureau of Immigration of the Philippines (or even on wikipedia which has a more digestible format... [Here is the link](#)) (clickable if read as a PDF).



For volunteers who get a 30 day visa upon arrival in the Philippines, the first extension will be for 29 days to bring you up to the 59 days. This will cost around 2200 php.

Please note that an extension after spending 59 days in the Philippines will require a one-time purchase of an ID card costing 4,000 PHPs on top of the extension fee.

NB: The above stated prices are subject to slight variations, this is only a rough guide.



PACKING LIST

The Philippines is hot and often humid. We suggest you choose light clothes that you don't mind getting dusty.

Filipino culture is relatively modest and we are very present in the local community so please bring items of clothing that cover your shoulders (a t-shirts are perfectly fine). This is also how we are expected to dress on base. If you need to visit anywhere more official, you will need longer shorts/skirt, or trousers. In general, avoid anything too revealing. Your best bet for social acceptance is to cover your shoulders with a t-shirt at all times.

- Plenty of t-shirts
- Shorts (that you don't mind getting dirty)
- One set of long clothing
- (Rain jacket if visiting July-Nov)
- Swimwear
- Rash guard
- Any of your own dive gear you wish to bring
- Dive torch*
- Hat
- Towels (having a quick drying microfiber one is great)
- Plenty of Sunscreen (coral safe preferably)
- Mosquito repellent (Anti malarial drugs not needed)
- Toiletries
- Padlock for personal locker

You do not need to bring bed linen, pillows or sleeping bags,. We have everything you need.

*Not required, but obviously handy if you want to go night diving.



MONEY

The currency here is the Philippino Peso (₱ or PHP).

Money exchanges are situated in Dumaguete, and the nearest ATM to base is about 10km away in Zamboanguita, so it is a good idea to bring some spending money with you. Smaller denominations are easier to use.

Whilst on base, you will only need to pay for any PADI courses and materials you do, as well as soft drinks etc. Payment can be made in either PHP or USD (however USD is not accepted in the Philippines). You may also wish to have a small amount of pesos to take our dedicated habal-habal service to the nearest resorts (70 - 120PHP per journey).

If you will be doing any scuba courses with us at MCP, the costs are as follows:

Open Water Diver	85 USD each
Advanced Open Water	
Rescue Diver	
Nitrox, Deep	
EFR (First Aid)	65 USD each

You can pay for courses using either cash USD or PHP, alternatively you can use credit card via Wise (or PayPal with an extra 3% PayPal fee added.)



COMMUNICATIONS AND MAIL

International mobile/cell phone roaming is available throughout most of the Philippines. Reception isn't the best at base, but generally if you stand in the middle of the botanical garden our base is in, there's reasonable signal strength. Do check with your service provider before arriving in the Philippines whether their service will allow international roaming. Local SIM cards can be purchased very cheaply (we suggest using Smart, as you get the best signal locally) but it is essential that your phone is unlocked or 'Open Line'.

Avoid getting a SIM at the airport if you can... They're over ten times the price they should be. Any small local shop with the green SMART logo will have SIMs. You will need to 'add load' via the kiosk at a 7eleven or card payment is available when you download the app.

The postal service within the Philippines is neither swift nor reliable. Mail, if it arrives at all, usually takes many months to reach us. We do not recommend having *anything* important sent to you while you volunteer. If your family sends you candy or other treats, most likely we will send you our thanks and a picture of us eating it long after you've left! Be aware, that if you send expensive things like perfumes, phones, cameras etc, they will get impounded by customs, and you will have to pay import tax.

DHL and FedEx will deliver to MCP, are unlike normal mail they are both fast and reliable. Our address if you need to send something is:

MCP, Siit Arboretum Barangay Lutoban,
6218 Zamboanguita,
Negros Oriental, Philippines.



VACCINATIONS



Strongly recommended:

- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- Hepatitis A (and B if combo shot)

Our base is a little nature haven in the woods, and you will be outside, and wear open footwear all the time. We ride trucks and occasionally boats to remote dive sites, we go diving, we plant mangroves and go out in the community. There's ample opportunity to get cuts, scrapes and scratches and if you don't already have the vaccinations listed above, we strongly suggest you get them before coming.

*We suggest you do your own research and check with the health authorities of your home country if Japanese Encephalitis is a recommended vaccination. There seems to be no clear answer, other than it's agreed that cases are very rare indeed.

Negros Oriental is **Malaria-free**, so you do not need to bring anti-malarial medication. If you intend to travel to other rural parts of the Philippines before or after volunteering with us, we suggest you check the current recommendations for that area.

We have a full first aid kit and generic medication for acute problems, but please make sure you bring ample personal medications, and enough of any prescription drugs to last you for the duration of your stay. If you need to refrigerate any medicine here, that's no problem at all.

INSURANCE

Life is unpredictable, so we **require** all volunteers to have travel insurance. In case of illness and/or accidents, MCP cannot help you financially, so please make sure you take out an insurance policy which covers:

- Scuba diving:
 1. Diving with compressed air to a depth of at least 30 meters.
 2. If you do divemaster training we strongly encourage you to have insurance covering diving up to 40m, as otherwise you cannot do such dives.
 3. If you do any technical training or technical diving with us, you **MUST** have and show insurance to us covering the sort of diving you will be doing.
- Extra activities, such as injuries incurred from light manual labour, sports, road and water transport etc
- Medical emergency repatriation
- Cancellations of your trip in cases of illness, bereavement, or any other serious event which could force you to cancel/withdraw from your stay (including such event in which for the safety of volunteers, MCP leaders temporarily or permanently closes the project).





ARRIVAL

Arriving in (and leaving) Dumaguete!

FLYING: There are three main airlines that run domestic flights to/from Dumaguete Airport. Cebu Pacific, Philippines Airlines and Air Asia. All three are absolutely fine for the very short flight from Manila or Cebu, but they are not always likely to run on time.

BY FERRY: Arriving by boat from any of the neighboring islands is also cheap and easy, and actually usually runs to time. Online timetables do exist but are subject to change. It's best to double check the schedule at the port you're leaving from.

Our private van will meet you the airport at 10am with our driver, Lito. He will be waiting for you outside arrivals, and bring you directly to base.

If your flight/boat time is tight, please arrive the day before. There are some lovely little hotels in Dumaguete (all on Booking.com or Agoda). Take a tricycle to the airport to meet Lito and your fellow volunteers for 10am on the Monday. For overnight stay in Dumaguete we recommend **The Flying Fish** or **The Bricks Hotel**.

On your last day on the program, a Monday morning many weeks later, we arrange for a free shared van for everyone leaving that day.

LIFE AT MCP

We live in the middle of a lush forest in what once used to be a botanical garden. When you arrive, you will have a base tour, complete the necessary paperwork and get you settled into your dorm.

You will be met by a handful of friendly dogs who look after base whilst we're off diving and provide great entertainment during morning briefings. The running of a typical day is usually something like this...

7 - 7.30 am	Breakfast Toast and cereal will be prepared. The kitchen is yours to make anything else you like.
7.40am	Morning Briefing
8am	Trucks leave for diving: After briefing we load our own gear and tanks onto the trucks.
1.30pm	Lunch: Prepared by kitchen staff back at base. Wash up your own plates.
3pm	Afternoon training for anyone on courses and learning their specialities.
4 - 7pm	Free time to chill, play games, work out, hammock naps etc.
7pm	Dinner: Prepared by kitchen staff, washed up by those on kitchen duty.

Kitchen Duty

Once a week, everyone has kitchen duty. This means setting out and clearing up all meals that day. After dinner, you will also wash up all pans and dishes and make sure the kitchen is tidy for the next day.

Dive shed Duty

Also once a week, this duty it involves giving the wash tanks a quick clean in the morning and filling them before we leave. Sweeping out the dive shed in the afternoons is easy and quick, just a little wet!



ACCOMMODATION

Dorms are mostly mixed and usually sleep six people. You will have a space under your bed for your bag, and a small private locker as well. Each bed has a mosquito net and we provide your bed linen and a pillow. Please bring your own towels.

SEE WHERE YOU WILL LIVE



Charging: There's of course fans and lights in the dorms, but due to fire safety, there's no sockets in the rooms. Electrical outlets are available many other places to charge your gadgets. Electricity is 220v, and outlets are dual-type sockets for both type A and C pictured right. If you want to lock your gadget away while charging, please bring your own padlock.



Safety: There is a security guard on base, but we suggest that when you are out for the day, you close the windows and lock the door of your hut. The guard will come round to turn lights on at nightfall if no-one else has done so. (He might have to pop into your dorm to do so.) Besides the private lockers, there is a safe on base where you are welcome to store passports and cash, if you like.

WiFi: We have broadband WiFi on base, It's not perfect but it's a decent enough connection for WhatsApp calls and Netflix in the communal areas. Please don't use it for torrents or illegal streaming sites, as our connection may be shut off if anyone does so.

Laundry: Volunteers have two choices with laundry. You can either hand-wash your own, or you can give it into the laundry service and have it done for you. On Tuesday mornings, all laundry is picked up, washed, folded and returned next morning, all for 220 PHP (around 4USD) for up to 8kg. Often volunteers pool their laundry together, both to save a little and to better preserve the environment.

Sundays: DAY OFF FOR EVERYONE! This includes all staff and kitchen staff. The kitchen is still open though and you are welcome to cook your own food. Some prefer spending the day off base and eating out at one of the nice and affordable resorts not too far away, others go all in and cook gourmet meals for a group. It's completely up to you. Sundays are a great day for waterfall trips, lake walks, visiting Valencia market, shopping in Dumaguete etc. It's all a bus ride away (or you can book a taxi van for a day if you are a few that want to go).



CONSERVATION AT MCP

Sea food is the primary protein source for almost all Filipinos, and the island nation is heavily dependent on successful fisheries for food security and social stability. At the same time coral reefs are under increasing pressures due to human pressures and climate change, and traditional coastal fisheries in the Philippines are suffering as a consequence. These challenges requires smart solutions, and this is where you come in!

MCP's goal is to ensure food security to local communities, and through alternate livelihood programs help ready communities for the societal changes brought about by diminishing fisheries outputs. By helping us as a scientific diver and contributing to our understanding of the problems faced, you help government agencies and academe understand the scope of the challenge and allow us to model trends and initiate intervention measures. To have solid data Marine Conservation Philippines split all scientific divers into three groups.

SUBSTRATE

Our "coral heads" spend their time identifying the extensive range of coral, cnidarians, sponges and other organisms making up the structure of the reef. They monitor coral illnesses, algal growth and sedimentation to give us an understanding of the resilience and development of the reef.

Training takes 1-2 weeks.

INVERTEBRATES

While less important than fish biomass, sea cucumbers, sea urchins and multiple other inverts are important commercial species for gleaners, and play important roles in the eco system. With excellent buoyancy the inverts team examine the reef carefully to monitor populations.

Training takes 2-3 weeks

FISH

The fish team identify and count more than 60 commercially valuable families of fish, and monitor specific "indicator species" which help us understand how resilient and effective a marine protected area is at providing eco system services.

Training takes 2-3 weeks.

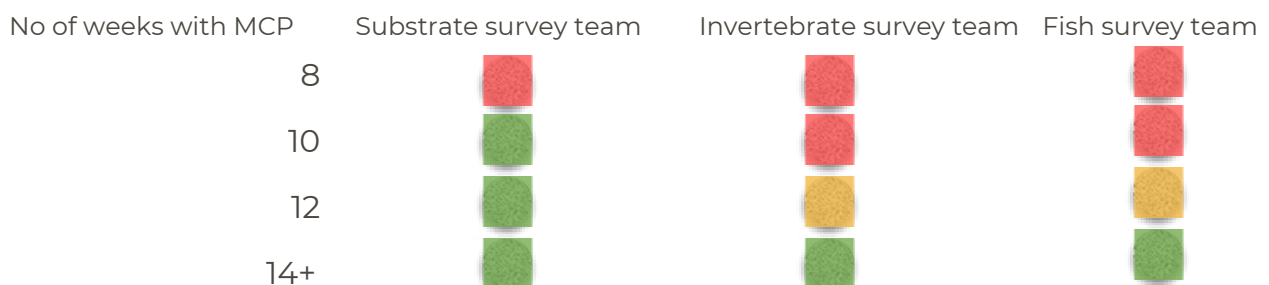
YOUR PARTICIPATION

Which team you will join depends partially on how long your stay is, our project needs at the time and whether you need to do any scuba courses to participate in the work. We try to ensure you will have an actual impact, so your stay has to be long enough for both the training and the scientific work. Volunteers on very long stays (18+ weeks, can be involved in more than one field of study.)

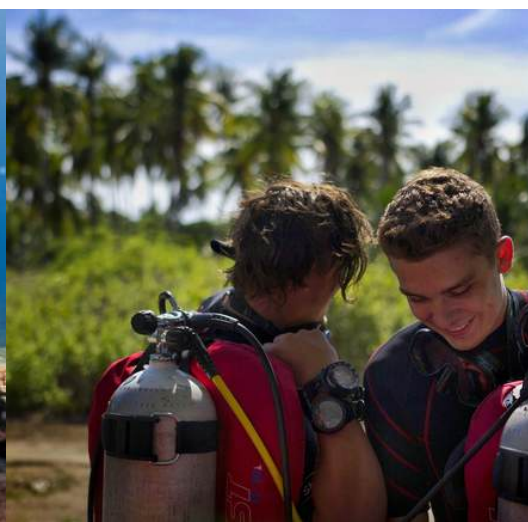
Likely survey group for regular MCP volunteers



Likely survey group for MCP volunteers on divemaster training



To better prepare yourself to take part in the scientific work, you are welcome to [follow this link](#) to look through the different manuals and presentations. We do not expect you do this before arrival, but if you have time and are curious the better prepared you are, the faster you will be become an expert survey diver.



THINGS WE DO...

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MCP has close ties with many community groups, and we work hard to ensure our efforts are seen as beneficial rather than adversarial to the fisherfolk communities. Part of this work is organizing and participating in various events, which range from helping paint a community hall, taking students snorkelling, leading sessions about plastic pollution, do joint beach clean-ups, deliver Christmas cheer and small gifts to local villages, host summer camps for kids, participate in and sponsor sports events, repairing a local road that is preventing us to get to a survey site and local families from easily accessing the water, retrieve lost fishing gear underwater, sponsor community events and many, many other things. What will be going on exactly while you are with is impossible to tell, but it is highly likely you will take part in some of these projects that benefit the people around us.

The community is incredibly friendly, and you will no doubt have a great time helping with this!

INTERVENTIONS

Crown of Thorn Starfish (COTS) are coral eating starfish, and because we monitor very large areas, we occasionally observe population blooms that reach outbreak levels and threaten important coral reefs. On careful examination of outbreak numbers, MCP may decide to intervene and cull a part of the starfish population. We never do this lighthearted, but when needed to protect the ecosystem, volunteers do the job.



BEACH AND DIVE CLEANS

Besides helping out by contributing to the long term strategic goals of MCP through the scientific diving you'll conduct, you will also help make an immediate impact on our home reefs. Every second week we select one of our dive sites and carry out beach and dive clean ups.

Trash from the sea routinely gets washed onto our shores and ends up lodged in into the reef. To date, we have removed (and where possible recycled) over a thousand tons of marine debris which would otherwise still be causing havoc to our coastline. These clean ups are hot and sweaty endeavors but it is very much worth the work (And cooling off with a scuba dive afterwards is very refreshing!)

MANGROVES

Mangroves are crucial habitats for fish in different life cycles, (to seek shelter amongst the roots) and are essential for coastal protection, marine diversity and local economy. During your stay, depending on seasons, you could be asked to help collect seedlings for mangrove nurseries and enjoy planting these incredible trees in various suitable locations. It's quite messy but a lot of fun!

We occasionally need to do further reef protection and go on an expedition to gather data of crown of thorn infestations. These are large starfish which eat the polyps and interconnecting tissues of the corals. We monitor CoT in our daily predation surveys, and focus dive teams will be sent out to respond to breakouts.



DOING SCUBA TRAINING AT MCP

To be able to safely and responsibly survey the coral reefs our volunteers all have to be excellent divers, as the scientific diving frequently entails very close proximity to the corals. To be able to help our volunteers reach this goal, we formally teach through the training agency PADI, but our courses are much expanded and take considerably longer. You also become a very excellent diver!

Providing the PADI curriculum has the added advantage of giving volunteers an internationally recognised certificate they can use in the future. Although courses are essentially free (you only pay the PADI fees for certification and materials, usually 85 USD for each course.) MCP has to limit availability of formal scuba instruction to a degree, to ensure everyone has the time to help with our scientific work.

We offer free training for one scuba course for each four week segment of your stay started. (divemaster and technical dive training excepted). If you stay for six or eight weeks, you could do up to two courses. If you stay ten or twelve weeks, it'd be three and so on. Everyone is welcome to do the Enriched Air Nitrox course however, as it only takes an afternoon, and doesn't get in the way of our normal work. As such it doesn't count as one of the "allowed courses," and you're welcome to join if it's offered while you are with us. Generally, we run a Nitrox course every three weeks.

If you are taking the divemaster course with us and do not have the prerequisite training (you need to be a rescue level diver, have proof of First Aid training within the last 24 months, and 40 logged dives) we will try to fast track your scuba training in the first month prior to starting the divemaster course. You will need to extend your stay for the time it takes to do this.

WHICH SCUBA COURSE(S) CAN YOU DO

YOU ARRIVE AS	6-8 WEEKS	10-12 WEEKS
NON-DIVER	open water + advanced	open water + adv. + rescue
OPEN WATER DIVER	advanced + rescue	advanced + rescue
ADVANCED OPEN WATER	rescue diver + deep	rescue diver + deep

The requirements and guidelines for doing PADI divemaster training are outside the scope of this info package. If you are interested, you may find the relevant info on our webpage.

PAPERWORK

Scuba diving is statistically very safe and we run our scientific diving operation with the greatest degree of safety possible. Scuba diving is however not completely risk free, nor is volunteer work for that matter. As such we ask that all participants of the project fill out liability releases before they are allowed to participate. You do not need to bring these releases with you (although you're welcome to) we have paper copies here for you to fill out once you've arrived, so you do not have to bother sending these back to us.



PADI Liability release
(diving activities)



MCP Liability release
(dry activities)

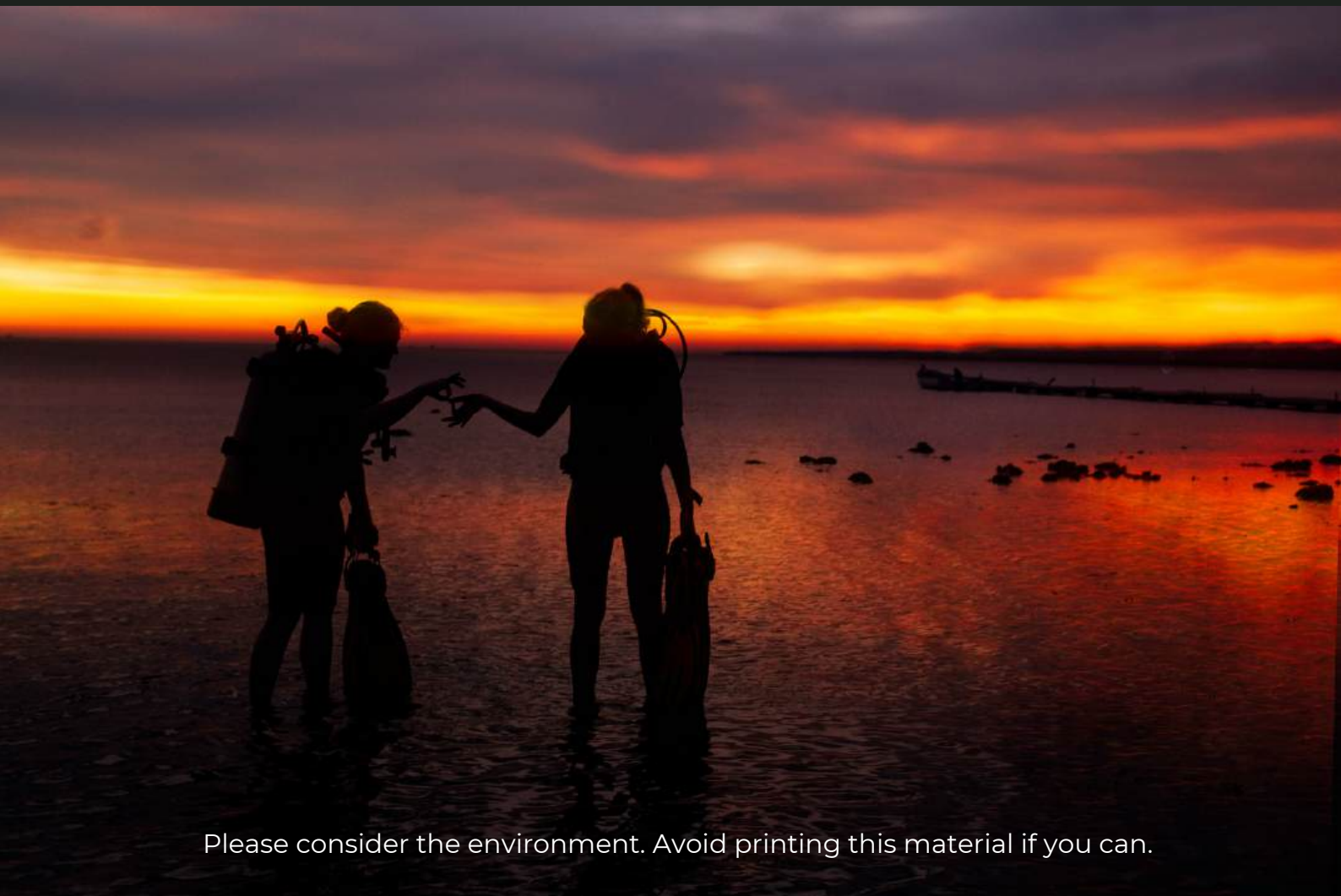
Your safety is extremely important to us. To ensure you do not dive or learn to dive with any health conditions which could be dangerous, please also fill out this medical form.



PADI Medical Form

If you answer yes to any questions on the medical form, you **must secure the written approval** for scuba diving by a doctor before you can dive with us. Your doctor needs to fill in page two of the form, giving his/her professional evaluation that you are fit for diving.

If you answer no to all questions on the health questionnaire, you do not need to seek approval from a doctor. (The only exception is if you will be doing divemaster or technical diver training with us, in which case you **MUST** get an ok from a doctor, regardless of your answers.)



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