Please consider the environment. Avoid printing this material if you can.
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, passion, money and energy to help protect nature so far from your home! Without this help we could do nothing and achieve none of our goals - 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
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 in the Philippines. With very few exceptions, this holds true for all passport holders, but the Philippines may change the visa policy from time to time. At the moment of writing, some countries for which the above at least holds true is: Australia, Canada, USA, all of the UK, All countries in Scandinavia, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Spain, New Zealand. There’s many more. We make no guarantees this list is correct - we encourage you to check whether this is true for you on the webpage of the Bureau of Immigration of the Philippines, or on wikipedia which has a more digestible format.

This is the link:  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_policy_of_the_Philippines (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 and 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, and so this is only a rough guide.
Packing list

The Philippines is hot and often humid too. We suggest you choose light clothes. Most volunteers who bring more than a pair or two of long pants and/or anything with long sleeves never use it. Please bring items of clothing that covers your shoulders (a normal t-shirt would be perfectly fine) If you want to be able to do work in the local community (like teaching in schools), you will need either some shorts that aren’t too short or a longer skirt or trousers. In general, avoid anything too flimsy or revealing. Your best bet for social acceptance is to cover your shoulders with a t-shirt at all times. Bottomline, please bring plenty of T-shirts.

If you are prone to getting bitten by mosquitoes, consider bringing some repellant. You do not need malaria-meds, as there is no malaria here. November till June are almost completely dry months, and there are very few mosquitoes anyway. Outside of those months it is also a good idea to bring a rain coat, just in case. It’s recommended to bring a little cheap flashlight. You do not need to bring any bedlinen, sleeping bags or similar – we got you covered. You do however need to bring your own towel(s) and toiletries. You will also need high SPF sunscreen. Please, please get a brand that is coral safe such as the one linked.

While not required, it is a good idea to bring a long sleeved rashguard (like the one pictured) to help again sunburn when diving and snorkeling.

Currency and money

The Philippine currency is Philippino Peso (PHP.) The nearest ATM is about 50km away in Dumaguete, so it is a good idea to bring some spending money with you. At MCP you may pay for any PADI courses or material as well as soft drinks etc. in either PHP or USD. In the Philippines in general though, USD is not accepted.

You can exchange money in Dumaguete.

If you will be doing any scuba courses while with MCP, cost of courses is as follows: Open Water Diver, Advanced Open Water, Rescue Diver and Nitrox are all 85 USD each. EFR (First Aid) and Deep are 65 USD each. (You can pay for courses using either cash USD or PHP; or by credit card via PayPal with an extra 3% fee added.)
Communications

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. Volunteers should check with their 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 with that) but it is essential that your phone is unlocked or ‘Open Line’.

The postal service within the Philippines is neither swift nor reliable and mail to or from MCP always takes two or more weeks to arrive. We do not recommend having anything important sent to you while you volunteer. In fact we don’t recommend having anything sent at all! 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. Regardless, if you really want to take the chance, the address for sending mail is:

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

Vaccinations and travel medicine

As a volunteer you’re living in the woods, you wear sandals all the time, you ride boats to dive sites, you plant mangroves, you may scratch yourself on corals. There’s ample opportunity to get cuts and scratches, and you should definitely get inoculated against diphteria and tetanus if you don’t have these shots already!

It is suggested you also get immunization against hepatitis A (you can get it in a combi-vaccine against hepatitis B, which some doctors suggest you get too)

Japanese encephalitis probably exist on all islands in the Philippines. A few hundred cases is reported nationwide each year, and because of this some foreign doctors recommend you get this vaccination also. We suggest you check with the health authorities of your home country. Most have some service for travellers seeking advice. This too holds true of vaccination against typhoid fever. Malaria is endemic to certain provinces in the Philippines, but is not a concern where we are located. Malaria in general is actually very rare in the whole Visayas region of the
Philippines. If you intend to travel to other rural parts of the Philippines before or after volunteering with us, we suggest you check with current recommendations for that area and take any measures you deem appropriate.

To summarise: Do not use any malaria meds here and do get the shots against diphteria, tetanus and hepatitis A. Do your own research and ask your own doctor if you should get shots against Japanese encephalitis and typhoid. We are no medical authority and you have to make your own choices.

Insurance

Life is uncertain. You never know what might happen, and we ask volunteers to have a travel insurance that covers them in case of illness or accidents. MCP cannot and will not help you financially, if you did not take out an insurance! Your policy must cover the following:

- All medical costs associated with scuba diving, including decompression chambers and diving with compressed air to a depth of at least 30 metres. If you are doing divemaster training with us, we strongly encourage you to have insurance covering diving up to 40m. 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.

- Volunteering activities, such as light manual labour, sports, road and water transport etc.

- Medical emergency repatriation.

- Insurance policies taken out by volunteers should cover cancellations of their trip in case of illness, bereavement in the family or other serious events forcing a volunteer to either cancel participation or withdraw prematurely from their stay, including such event in which for the safety of volunteers, MCP leaders temporarily or permanently has to close the project.
A typical week

Monday - Friday, work in the field

Saturday - Field work if deadlines require it. Sometimes community work, or maybe a trip to Apo Island, exploratory diving or other things. Special meal that night.

Sunday - Off. Everyone is off. Rest, relax, gather strength for a new week.

What a normal day looks like

07:00: Breakfast
07:20: Dive Briefing
07:30: Load up Trucks
08:00: Leave for Diving
13:30: Back at base - clean gear and dive shed
14:00: Lunch - clear your own dishes
15:00: Most days a lecture or other afternoon activities + data entry from surveys
16:30: Free time to workout, run, play games etc
19:00: Dinner (it’s your turn to do the dishes once a week!)
20:00: Relax/Socialize - or study for scuba dive course
You know that MCP is working to conserve the marine areas of the Philippines. That’s why you’re coming after all. Conservation however means different things to different people. The foundation of Conservation at MCP is built on four pillars: Science, Education, Application and Integration. You will take part in all aspects.

A lot of our results are achieved through long term monitoring. This basically means we study the reef (and seagrass beds and mangroves) and everything that interacts with it (i.e. fish, invertebrates, human disturbances etc) and monitor how it changes over time. We use this data to help determine what efforts should be implemented in order to maintain or improve the health of ecosystems. This includes setting up marine protected areas, planting mangrove forests, educating local groups about overfishing, dealing with marine pollution and many other things. But, in order to gather this data we need numerous surveys. This is where you come in as trained volunteer.

During your time here you will be placed in one of three dive teams, either the Fish, Invertebrate, or Substrate survey team. Which team you join will depend on how long your stay is, our project needs at the time and if you need to do any scuba courses to participate in the work. For example... to join the fish survey team you need three weeks of fish training, while for the invert team you only need one or two weeks.... Plus you still need time to actually do the surveys and possibly required scuba courses. So if you come for 6-8 weeks you can expect to join either the invert or the substrate team, whereas those who sign up for longer might possibly join the fish team (with the exception of those doing the divemaster course... then at least 12 weeks would be required).

COVID stopped a lot of community engagement, but we are aiming to rebuild the program. From time to time we work with local schools and orphanages to help teach the local youth about the importance of protecting their fragile marine habitats. The Filipino people rely heavily on their waters for income and livelihood so protecting and conserving it should be a high priority. During your time here, you may be asked to partake in camps, or educational days for local school groups. The activities inevitably change over time but could involve taking students snorkelling, teaching them about plastic pollution, maybe do a joint beach clean-up... But, whichever it is, a fun and a rewarding experience is usually had by all.
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. Each 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 lodges in or falls down onto the reef. Most weeks we take one day and try to remove as much of this trash from the ocean and beaches as we can. To date we have removed - and recycled whenever possible - many, many tons of marine debris which would otherwise still be causing havoc. Other times we retrieve and salvage ghost nets or other lost fishing gear that damages the reef.

During your stay, depending on seasons, you could be asked to collect seedlings for the mangrove nurseries we run; help with local outreach projects like painting murals with school children; go on an expedition to gather data or fight a crown of thorn infestation; help repair a local road that is preventing us to get to a survey site or any number of other project that’s going on at MCP. The nature of these other projects efforts change over time, and what sort of work you could be involved with depends on seasons, opportunities and project priorities.

At the end of the day, everyone who volunteers with us is working towards a common goal of helping to save fragile marine ecosystems through conservation efforts, but without local support our efforts have little impact. As such, what we do and how we interact with our friends and supporters in the local community is of vital importance to the continued success of the program. We expect all volunteers to behave with respect, and show consideration for a culture that may be different from their own in some or many aspects. Generally speaking, with enthusiasm, a willingness to learn new things and consideration for people and culture you’ll come a long way.
Below are two simple charts that outlines which survey team you will likely join based on your length of stay. I.e if you are staying for eight weeks, you could be placed in either the invert team or the substrate team, but not the fish team.

### Likely survey group for regular MCP volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of weeks with MCP</th>
<th>Substrate survey team</th>
<th>Invertebrate survey team</th>
<th>Fish survey team</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>12+</td>
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</table>

### Likely survey group for MCP volunteers on divemaster training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of weeks with MCP</th>
<th>Substrate survey team</th>
<th>Invertebrate survey team</th>
<th>Fish survey team</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>16+</td>
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To better prepare yourself to take part in the work you are invited to go to http://www.marineconservationphilippines.org/volunteer-downloads and look through the different manuals, presentations and Anki decks.

Each manual describes how each survey works. We recommend taking a quick look through the manuals most suited for your stay but if you are really keen feel free to take a look at them all.

Next we suggest looking through both the invertebrate and substrate presentations (you can also look through the fish presentation if you are interested). They provide some information and pictures about the species you will be asked to learn to identify. We have noticed over time, that volunteers who have done some pre-studying tend to be survey-ready much, much faster. So, to get the most out of your time at MCP we recommend looking through the presentation before you arrive (even if it is just on the airplane). But to really master the skills there is the Anki deck system...

The Anki deck is a flashcard system that remembers your skill level. Each time you play, it remembers which ones you got right and wrong and presents you with the appropriate cards to build on your weak skills. Playing it a few days will greatly speed up your in water training and allow you to move through the training system quickly. It can be downloaded to your computer, tablet, or phone, so you could easily work on your skills during one of your (hopefully not too long) layovers.

You now have the tools to become an MCP expert identifier (not that we expect you to be one before you arrive - but all the more respect if you are!) and look forward to diving with you. Happy travels and see you soon!
Life at MCP base

Each volunteer has a private locker (please bring your own padlock.) There’s an electrical outlet in each locker, so you can charge your gadgets in there too. Besides the private lockers, there’s also a safe on base, in which you are welcome to store travel documents, passports and cash.

There are a handful of playful dogs and a guard on base. We do not have any problems with theft, but obviously it’s better being safe than sorry! When you are away, we ask you to please close the windows and lock the door of your hut.

Electricity is 220v, and most outlets on base are dual-type sockets and can take both type A and C pictured right.

In some areas of the base there is WiFi signal that you’re welcome to use. Due to our remote location speed often leaves something to be desired and it’s shared between many people. The speed is generally enough to check mails though and you may be able to do a Skype conversation too, but please do not try to download all episodes of Friends or otherwise ruin online life for everyone else.

Volunteers have two choices with laundry. You can either wash by hand (we have washing powder you may use for free) or you can hand it in to have it done for you at cost. Twice a week, all laundry is picked up, washed and returned next morning. The price of this is 200 PHP (around four USD) for up to 8kg. Often volunteers pool their laundry together, both to save a little and to better preserve the environment.

Once a week every volunteer has kitchen duty. As you’re doing it with three or four other people it’s very easy and only take a few minutes. We have an amazing cook working for us and together with her equally skilled husband she does all the magic in the kitchen. Volunteers however help set the tables, bring out food and do the dishes after meals. If you are vegetarian or vegan that’s no problem at all. If you have any food allergies, do please let the kitchen know.

On Sundays all staff has a day off, and this includes kitchen staff. The kitchen is however open, and you are welcome to cook your own food. Some prefer something easy like making toasts or eating out (there’s a few nice and affordable resorts not too far away) others go all in and cook gourmet meals. It’s completely up to you.
There is free water, coffee and tea available at all times. You can drink the tap water at MCP base, as we have our own solar powered deep well, (but please do not drink tap water anywhere else in the Philippines). Various soft drinks and beverages including ones with alcohol can be purchased cheaply on site. We’re fine with people having a drink or two at night, and for sure there will be parties, local fiestas, volunteer birthdays now and then and so on. If you want more than a drink or two, the time for this is Saturday, where we have an end-of-the-week barbecue and everyone has the next day off. Generally we expect of everyone to exercise a sensible degree of moderation, especially if diving the next day. Loud drunken behaviour that may annoy others on base is very much not accepted.

Marine Conservation Philippines reserves the right to terminate the stay of any volunteer whose behaviour is deemed to be offensive to other volunteers, staff of the surrounding community.

At divesites, getting into and out of wetsuits, it is of course understood that you need to be in swimwear. During transportation to and from divesites, please cover up. This too is true at base. It is a workplace, not a dive resort. Please refrain from sunbathing and wearing too skimpy clothes.
Arriving and leaving

There’s three airlines that operate domestic routes to/from Dumaguete Airport. Cebu Pacific, Philippines Airlines (PAL) and Air Asia. We do not have any particular recommendations on which is the best, and in either case it’s only a short flight from Cebu or Manila where you will enter the country if you’re a foreigner.

To make your first day with Marine Conservation Philippines the best possible, and to allow for ample time to sort out paperwork, scuba gear and letting you settle in well at base, we ask everyone to **arrive no later than 10am**. We will meet you in the airport and be waiting for you outside. Once you and your fellow volunteers have arrived, we will drive down to our base from Dumaguete airport. (We’ll wait for any delayed flights) If you cannot arrive in time for the 10am shuttle, please try and arrive the day before and spend the night in a local hotel. (Check Agoda or Tripadvisor for recommendations, and then take a tricycle to the airport the next day)

On your last day on the program, a Monday morning many weeks later, we arrange for a free shared ride for everyone leaving that day. We ask everyone to leave in the morning, so we can ready for the new arrivals. If you have a late flight, enjoy a coffee in Starbucks in Dumaguete and enjoy some wifi that’s definitely better than ours! :)
Doing scuba training

MCP offers scuba diver training through the PADI curriculum of diver education. The work we do requires scientific diving, so we obviously need to offer training, and the PADI curriculum has the added advantage of giving volunteers an internationally recognised certificate they can use in the future. We are however not a recreational dive centre and do not take in outsiders. It is also a very clear priority for our program that volunteers who join us actually help out with our work. This means, that although courses are essentially free (you only pay the fees to PADI for certification and materials) MCP has to limit availability of training to a degree to ensure our work is actually carried out.

As a rule of thumb, we offer free training in one scuba course (excepting divemaster and technical dive training) for each four week segment or beginning of it. 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. The Enriched Air Nitrox course 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 take the course if it’s offered while you are with us. Generally, we run a nitrox course every two or three weeks.

The only exception to the above rules is if you have pre-arranged doing divemaster training with us. In this case, if you do not have the prerequisites in order when you arrive (besides having 40 logged dives, you must be advanced open water, rescue diver and have recent first aid training) we will try to fast track your training in the first month prior to starting the divemaster course.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>YOU ARRIVE AS</th>
<th>6-8 weeks</th>
<th>10-12 weeks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non diver</td>
<td>open water + advanced</td>
<td>open water + advanced + rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Water Diver</td>
<td>advanced + rescue</td>
<td>advanced + rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Open Water</td>
<td>rescue diver + deep</td>
<td>rescue diver + deep</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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.
Important paperwork before you come

Scuba diving is statistically very safe and we run our scientific diving operation with the greatest degree of safety we realistically can. 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 a liability release before they are allowed to participate.

You do not need to bring this release with you (although you’re welcome to) but if you don’t, you will be asked to fill one out here upon arrival. As such it makes sense you know the content of it before you arrive.

You may download it [here](#).

Additionally you must fill out a medical release, to ensure you do not dive or learn to dive with any health conditions which may be dangerous to you.

You may download it [here](#).

If you truthfully have to answer yes to any single (or multiple) questions on the health questionnaire, 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, authorising you to take part in scuba diving. It may seem like hassle, but obviously it’s in your own best interest to ensure you are healthy enough 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, no matter what you state on the form.)
Please consider the environment. Avoid printing this material if you can.