Volunteer expeditions 2023
Monitoring the Open Sea

Balearic Islands: MEDTOP “IRUKA”
SINCE 1990 ALNITAK HAS BEEN CONDUCTING OPEN SEA EXPEDITIONS FOCUSING ON TOP PELAGICS (WHALES, DOLPHINS, TURTLES, ELASMOBRANCHS, TUNAS, MANTAS AND BIRDS) AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES. THESE 11-DAY EXPEDITIONS ARE INTENSIVE, WEATHER-DEPENDANT AND NO TWO EXPEDITIONS ARE THE SAME. VOLUNTEERS JOINING ARE INTEGRATED QUICKLY AS PART OF THE CREW, EXPERIENCING OUR DAILY LIVES AS RESEARCHERS.
Our impact

All our projects are “applied science” which means we pursue tangible outcomes for conservation. Over the years we can highlight some of Alnitak’s accomplishments:

- Design, management and monitoring of 18 MPAs both in the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Reconfiguration of IMO traffic separation schemes.
- Mitigating the risk of turtle bycatch (over 95% - estimated between 20 and 30,000 loggerhead turtles per year in Spanish longline fishery targeting swordfish).
- Mitigation of the risk of noise pollution.
- Contributing to species management plans, for example of the endangered Mediterranean common dolphin.
- “Train the trainers” programmes for fishers, scientists and stakeholders in the EU, Africa and Latin America.
- Contributing to policy frameworks, actively cooperating with UNDP GEF, FAO GEF, ACCOBAMS, NOAA, etc.
In September we will work in what is probably the Balearic Island’s best kept secret: the Tramuntana mountains. Here we will immerse ourselves in our ongoing marine conservation and research programmes while enjoying the day to day of a Mediterranean rural lifestyle.

Our base camp will be a small mountain “Cortijo” owned by one of the local fishermen, Gori, who we collaborate with. On good sea days we will work either from Alnitak’s RIB “Iruka” or Gori’s small artisanal fishing vessel “Passador”. On bad sea days, we will dedicate time to a variety of chores such as renovating our new campsite, data entry, and more. We will do our best to live sustainably, acquiring our groceries from the local farmers markets, and breaking up daily chores between the whole team.

Our main port will be the picturesque town of Sóller (about 15 minutes from our base), and transects at Sea will be designed to survey the Tramuntana escarpment, home to a variety of species such as striped dolphins and Risso’s dolphins. The Risso’s dolphins were recently classed as Endangered by the IUCN in the Mediterranean Sea, and we will try to take as much data and imagery as possible from encounters. In the case of loggerhead turtles, our main goal is to tag them with satellite trackers which allows us to learn about their ecology. We will also be reporting on drifting ghost gear, such as “ghost FADs” which are rudimentary artefacts that often entangle and kill turtles and cetaceans.

This is a new and exciting type of Alnitak expedition, in which volunteers actively participate in its development and hopefully success in years to come. The end goal is to establish ourselves here in Tramontana, developing our scientific projects on wildlife and the risks they face but also actively working alongside locals such as artisanal fishermen.
WE SUBDIVIDE OUR WORK INTO TWO LARGE PROGRAMMES: **MEDTOP** - SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS USING TOP PELAGICS AS UMBRELLA SPECIES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE OPEN SEA ECOSYSTEM, AND **TODOS POR LA MAR** - ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN PRACTICAL AND TANGIBLE CONSERVATION. ALNITAK PARTNERS WITH INSTITUTES SUCH AS THE US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, NOAA, THE BALEARIC ISLANDS COASTAL OBSERVING AND FORECASTING SYSTEM (SOCIB), OCEANCARE, SPANISH INSTITUTE OF OCEANOGRAPHY (IEO), IFREMER, EXETER UNIVERSITY AND MANY MORE. RESULTS FROM EXPEDITIONS CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO ONGOING RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION PROJECTS.
Another boat that we are working with is the fishing “llaüt” (traditional type of boat in the Balearics), PASSADOR, a well-known artisanal fishing boat of the Balearic Islands. His owner and skipper Gregori (Gori) is one of those fishers that is committed to improving the sustainability of fishing and preserving the maritime culture of the Mediterranean. Based in the beautiful port of Soller, Passador has been involved in experiments with our OASIS Satlink ELB buoy, aimed at improving the anchored fish aggregating devices (aFAD) fishery.

Alnitak’s research vessel in the Tramontana area will be our reliable and versatile “IRUKA”, which we will spend many hours aboard when conditions allow. Prior to surveys, we will design transects and divide tasks on board such as shifts on look-out, data collection, and documenting. IRUKA is also a great vessel for photographing and filming wildlife up close, retrieving marine garbage including ghost gear adrift, and conducting samplings such as of microplastic on the sea surface thanks to our manta trawl.
Volunteering programme

- Expedition duration: 11 days
- Teams: 2 Alnitak team members : 1 Fisher : 6 volunteers
- Vessels: Iruka III (6.5m rib) / Passador
- Home base: Passador cabin Fornalutx
- Rendez-vous: Palma de Mallorca -Sa Llotja bar

Accommodation: Camping style for season of 2023

Included: Vehicle, vessels, research and restoration equipment, insurance, all meals (except meals taken outside).

Upon signing up you will receive a BRIEFING document with further details as well as a check-list of appropriate things to pack, and other information to enhance your experience.

Itinerary

- **Day #1** – Rendez-vous at 16:00 and Introduction,
- **Days #2 to #10** Survey at sea / Restoration / Data processing
- **Day #11** Relax and departure at 16:00

**Daily schedule:** Early rise (sometimes before sunrise, start survey / restoration, breakfast at sunrise, snack at 11:00, lunch at 13, dinner at 20:00)
Guided by locals that are working to preserve their cultural and natural treasures.

The perfect combination of hard work and meditation in the magical surroundings of Tramuntana

Skills required: Passion and interest in playing an active role in the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Special skills of interest: Boat driving license, navigation, carpentry, painting, navigation, photography, video filming, drone flying, camping, star gazing, cooking,..

Limitations: The 2023 Expeditions will be living in camping conditions.
Activities

“Household” activities:
• Groceries (eco-local-seasonal) + cooking
• Cleaning

Conservation activities:
• Restoration of “El Passador’s” cabin
• Clearing old stuff & painting
• Carpentry and small construction
• Olive tree maintenance
• Old roman stone wall repairs

Visual & acoustic survey on Iruka III
• Iruka rib maintenance
• Driving Iruka rib (license necessary)
• look-out watches and acoustic and visual sampling stations
• Assistance in photo-id and filming of cetaceans and turtles
• Drone filming of turtle (oasis effect)
• Assistance in sea turtle satellite tagging

Sustainable, artisanal fishing:
• Assisting in navigation and fishing maneuvers
• Filming and photographing artisanal fishing
Despite the fact that we are offering a good load of amazing magical experiences, we believe also that free time is important to make your experience in Mallorca perfect.

During your stay with us there will be ONE OFF day for both the Alnitak team and volunteers. Alnitak’s team uses this “OFF day” to carry out office work. We are a very small team therefore please respect this assigned time the team will need to do their land based work.

We recommend that volunteers add on a few days to visit an island that is much more than “cheap beach tourism” but if you don’t have the time to extend your holiday, don’t worry.

Our last expedition day, we allocate time to wrap up the results of the expedition, discuss our experiences, and enjoy some time just resting and enjoying the Island.

BRING YOUR SNORKELLING GEAR!
Quick reference sign-up checklist:

1) Visit our alnitak.org website
2) Click on “Get Involved - Join the crew as volunteer”
3) Fill out and submit the online application
4) Make the deposit

...and you’re done! You will receive an email from us within 48 hours.

Upon signing up you will receive a BRIEFING document with further details as well as a check-list of appropriate things to pack, and other information to enhance your experience as well as our policy which are important documents to read through.

You will also be asked to fill in online forms regarding diet, health information, etc. so everything is ready pre-departure.

Our email: info@alnitak.org
How is Alnitak committed to my safety?
Risk is an inherent part of our work. Which is why volunteers are given a safety briefing upon joining and project staff are trained in appropriate emergency response procedures. If needed and despite cruising in open waters, we can typically get a helicopter in under 30 minutes for a quick transfer to hospital or else cruise to the closest harbour.

Do I need to have any prior scientific or boating knowledge?
No, you will be taught everything you need to know. Part of the immersive experience is to partake directly in boating manoeuvres and scientific research.

What kind of physical shape do I need to be in?
Prepare for long days at sea and living in camping conditions. These expeditions are no pleasure trip, and there is a “rough and tough” aspect to them.

What is included in the cost of my contribution?
When you join, you do more than contribute your valuable time and effort. Your contribution is also vital to help cover project costs, crew, locally sourced food, restoration and other key expenses which get us out of the port and into the open sea.

How does my contribution make an impact?
All Alnitak’s research is applied science, so data collected on these expeditions is used to inform environmental policy-makers and for management plans.

Can I travel alone?
Yes! One of the great thing about Alnitak expeditions is that you get thrown in with a community of like-minded adventurers who have signed up to make a tangible contribution to marine conservation.

How old do you have to be to volunteer?
Some volunteer opportunities will require a minimum age of 18 although on occasions we taken on volunteers of at least 16 years of age. Volunteers under the under the age of 18 must send along a signed Permission Form by a parent/guardian in order to participate.