



Operation Wallacea

Conservation research through academic partnerships

Information for Local Education Authorities on the Health & Safety measures taken to safeguard the Operation Wallacea expeditions to Cuba

Contents page

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Structure of the expeditions	3
3. Risk assessments	4
4. Training before the expedition	4
5. Designated leaders and competencies.....	5
7. Medical procedures.....	6
8. Operating procedures.....	7
9. Emergency procedures	8
10. Insurance.....	8
11. Child Protection procedures	9
12. Communications.....	10
13. Transport.....	10
14. Accommodation and camp security.....	10

1. Introduction

The aim of this document is to highlight the procedures and protocols in place for school groups who are involved with Operation Wallacea research expeditions in Cuba. It is intended to fulfill the criteria set by the local education authorities with regard to overseas expeditions and is based on the information requirements set out in *Guidelines for Educational Visits and Outdoor Education Activities 2004*, produced by Surrey County Council. The Surrey CC document in turn is based on the Department for Education and Employment *Health & Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (1998)* and on the August 2002 document produced by the Department for Education and Skills entitled *Standards for LEA's in Overseeing Educational Visits*. As with all these documents the aim is to ensure that there are adequate preparations and safety systems in position to ensure that best practice with regard to Health & Safety issues is being used in the planning and implementation of the expeditions.

2. Structure of the expeditions

The structure of the expeditions is a little different to that with many other expeditions or educational trips that are run by schools. Operation Wallacea is working with the University of Havana running a biodiversity research programme on the Island of Youth (Isla de Juventud). Our partners in Cuba (The University of Havana) lead these surveys with additional help provided by university students who pay for the experience. The university students and school groups are joining this survey programme and provide additional manpower to the survey areas.

The school groups will divide their time in the first week between learning to dive to PADI Open Water level, and againing skills in benthic and reef fish identification. Accommodation during this week is in the Colony Hotel with daily trips out on the dive boat to the Punta Frances reserve (1.5 hours journey time approx.).

For the second week school student groups spend two days working on the stereo video and benthic surveys with turtle monitoring, two days analysing the stereo video data and two days helping with the manatee surveys. During the stereo video surveys the students will be based on the Felipe Poey ship but the remaining nights they will be in the Colony Hotel.



Figure 1 Position of the Isle of Youth site and Havana.

3. Risk assessments

A thorough assessment of all camps and activities are completed before the start of the season and reviewed throughout. Risk assessments are completed for each site as well as generic risk assessments for each activity. These risk assessments are published on the website and are available by hard copy if requested.

4. Training before the expedition

Operation Wallacea staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the expedition abroad. Various joint meetings take place with our schools team and the teachers regarding facilities on site and skills required. A full training day is arranged with each of the schools with the following aims:

1. Assessment of the level of fitness of the pupils

Fitness levels are not an issue with this project apart from the dive training course which requires that the trainee can swim 200m.

2. Survey methods

All the students are given a training session in February/March before their expedition on the aims of the survey work they will be completing and the basic methodologies that they will be following.

3. Expectations from the trip

The facilities at each site, the equipment that students will require, and any information that teachers or students may find useful in preparing for travel to Cuba is communicated comprehensively to students and their parents at the training session. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any aspects of the expeditions, and the preparation required.

Whilst Operation Wallacea aims to ensure that the pupils are well prepared for the expedition, the teachers are responsible for the dynamics and teamwork abilities of the group.

5. Designated leaders and competencies

Role of the teachers

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the pupils' travel arrangements from the school until the expedition start time at the Colony Hotel at 0800hrs on a Friday morning. Once the expedition start the teachers will be travelling with the group and responsible for pastoral care issues and checking that the safety procedures run by Operation Wallacea are working in full. At the end of the expeditions on a Thursday at 1400hrs the teachers and the group are responsible for accompanying the group back to the UK.

Role of Operation Wallacea staff

Senior Operations Manager

The Senior Operations Manager is responsible for the overall running of the expeditions and for the safety of the volunteers and staff working on the project. He has various staff assisting in different aspects of the project. For the 2011 field season Dr Jorge Angulo Valdes will be fulfilling this role. Jorge has managed the Operation Wallacea expeditions in Cuba since they began in 2006, and has 12 years experience of supervising research groups and running training courses for British Universities. Dr Valdes speaks excellent English.

It is the responsibility of the Senior Operations Manager to ensure that the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the groups and to check that the designated leaders have the requisite qualifications and/or experience.

Leadership during transfers

The school groups will be met at Havana airport by English speaking staff from Quick Viaggi who will be organising their internal transfers and accommodation to the start of the expedition.

Leadership at Colony Hotel

Phil Stanier is the Cuba Country Manager and will be based at the Colony Hotel. Mr Stanier is a Deputy Head teacher in a Birmingham secondary school and has 10 years of experience on leading and managing expeditions.

Leadership on the live-aboard whilst based in the manatee zone

Whilst the students are based on the research vessel at the manatee zone they will be directly supervised by Anmari Alvarez, from the University of Havana. Anmari has worked with Operation Wallacea in Cuba for the last three years and has led several research groups in the manatee zone on the Isle of Youth.

Leadership on the Felipe Poey

Dr Jorge Valdes will lead the Felipe Poey research teams for the 2011 season. The captain of the Felipe Poey (the research ship used for the training) is a Master Mariner qualified with the International Maritime Organisation.

Leadership for diving activities

All dive training is led by PADI qualified Dive Instructors and the Divemasters are qualified to CMAS level 3. Dive training is done at a ratio of one Dive Instructor and one Divemaster per eight students. For groups of trainee divers of four or less then one Dive Instructor is able to take the group. For qualified divers the ratio is six divers per one Divemaster.

7. Medical procedures

This section summarises the medical procedures report which is a much more detailed description of the staffing, First Aid facilities and procedures to be followed.

Information and records

All school staff and pupils are required to complete an Operation Wallacea medical questionnaire prior to their departure and those participants who are diving during the expedition will be required to also complete a PADI medical questionnaire according to the rules and regulations set out by PADI. These forms are required to be completed and returned to the Operation Wallacea Medical Coordinator at least 3 months in advance of the expedition. The medical staff will review the medical forms received and identify any potential medical issues that could restrict sites or activities for individual pupils or staff, or aspects which require additional information before the start of the expedition. All medical information is held securely under the guidelines provided by the data protection act.

On site medical information about each pupil and teacher is provided to the Medical officer at the Colony Hotel and a file is created for each person. All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the season, these data are collated and a health and safety report is completed and published on the website. This report classifies incidents into seven categories and allows comparison between the expeditions and other activities. The policy of publication of the accidents and illnesses recorded on the expedition is a unique aspect of the Operation Wallacea expeditions and helps ensure the procedures on site are followed fully.

Medical staffing

There is 24/7 nursing cover and a well stocked Clinic at the Colony Hotel. In addition there is an Opwall appointed doctor based on the Felipe Poey. On the Felipe Poey Research vessel the captain also has an International Maritime Organisation qualification in Emergency First Aid.

Medical facilities

A full medical kit is available at the Colony Hotel at the clinic, and another kit is available on the Felipe Poey which includes the equipment and medications needed to be able to deal with the minor conditions that may be encountered in the field. Each of the dive boats also have a First Aid kit. Research into medical facilities in-country are completed prior to the start of the season by the University of Havana and are checked at the start by the medical officer.

8. Operating procedures

There are detailed operating procedures for all aspects of expedition management. The main measures used to minimise risk are included in the risk assessments which are published on the web site but are summarised below if they are not included in other sections of this report:

Diving

All diving follows protocols that are more conservative than PADI procedures. All training dives are completed with a ratio of one Dive Instructor plus one Divemaster to a group of no more than eight students. All qualified divers are accompanied by a Dive Master at a ratio of 1:6. Maximum diving depth is 18m, maximum dive time is 50 minutes and all divers have to perform a five minute safety stop at 5m on the way up. Minimum surface interval time is three hours. No night diving is allowed. These restrictions mean that all divers are well within the limits allowed for no-decompression recreational diving by PADI.

Snorkelling and swimming

No snorkelling or swimming is allowed from any of the beaches unless authorised by the Country Manager or Venture Leader and within 30m off shore. If there are any students swimming there must be a shore watcher and a throw line available at all times. Snorkelling and swimming from the research ship must be authorised by the

captain or Dr Valdes. There must be a Dive Master watching from the boat and a throw ring in the water. The Dive Leader will ensure the group stop every two minutes and look around them for boats.

Alcohol

Alcohol is available at the Colony Hotel and on the Felipe Poey research ship. Whilst the school group is under the care of Operation Wallacea no school group member under 18 (the legal age for drinking alcohol in Cuba) is permitted to consume alcohol. For those over 18 alcohol intake has to be strictly limited since it would affect the safety of the diving.

9. Emergency procedures

This section summarises the emergency and medical evacuation report which is a much more detailed description of the procedures used at each of the sites.

Training of staff

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place in all of the sites in Cuba and are designed with the worse case senario in mind. All staff will have training on evacuation procedures, and protocols are rehearsed prior to the expeditions starting.

Emergency levels

Operation Wallacea has two levels of evacuation as follows: **Emergency** (requiring the fastest possible transfer by speedboat and ambulance to the hospital facilities in Nueva Gerona and **Medium Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved as quickly as possible without the need to hire special vehicles or boats to the nearest appropriate medical facilities).

10. Insurance

Insurance is provided on the expedition, which provides adequate medical and repatriation cover for all the expedition activities that will be undertaken by Operation Wallacea volunteers.

The important issue from the expedition management viewpoint is that contact has been made in advance of the start of the expedition with the insurance company to obtain details of their proposed rescue facilities in country. This is the case with all Opwall expeditions. Operation Wallacea have agreements in place before any emergency occurs so that the various actions needed to respond to an emergency can be taken as quickly as possible.

Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

11. Child Protection procedures

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children's act 1999. This is done a number of ways:

Supervision and accompanying adults.

Operation Wallacea offer a free teacher place with every 10 students thus giving an automatic ratio of at least 1 to 10 (in line with the DfES). For each activity provided by Operation Wallacea in the field the following staff ratios apply:

- 1 to 6 ratio for Turtle monitoring work
- 1 to 4 ratio for training dives
- 1 to 6 ratio for dives with qualified divers

These ratios do not include other supervisory staff such as guides, medics or the schoolteachers. Overall there is at least a 1 to 3 ratio of adult staff to students on site providing a very high level of supervision. Teachers are asked to accompany students on as many activities as possible.

Minimum number of students

No school pupil is allowed to participate in any activity without at least one other pupil from the school or a teacher being present.

Criminal Records Bureau Checks

All Cuban academic and dive staff have had their backgrounds checked by the University of Havana and no staff with any criminal records are employed. The accompanying teachers are already CRB checked and there will always be an accompanying teacher at any overnight location. In addition all the UK based Opwall staff have enhanced CRB checks.

Codes of Practice

All staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed. The Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with school volunteers as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. The University of Havana will dismiss staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

Complaints procedure

Any complaint by a school pupil about inappropriate behaviour from any staff member or other student will be treated as a formal complaint and documented. The accompanying teacher will be informed immediately and together with the senior Operation Wallacea staff member on site will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is upheld then any individuals involved will be dismissed from the expedition and a police file created if the incident was serious enough.

12. Communications

There is mobile phone coverage at the Colony Hotel, Marina and in some parts of Punta Frances National Park and Siguanea Bay. The Colony hotel and Marina have land line phones and the Colony Hotel has email (albeit very slow!). In addition there are VHF radio communications at the Marina, each of the research ships and the Punta Frances ranger station. The coastguards have radio contact with the ship. The survey groups on the beaches doing the turtle monitoring use walkie talkies to communicate back to the Felipe Poey.

There is a 24-hour emergency officer based in the UK office (tel +44 (0)1790 763194) in the event of an emergency message needing to be passed on to the field. The direct numbers for the key staff in Cuba during the expeditions are published on the web site shortly before the start of the expeditions. There is an English speaking contact in Havana who meets all groups or students arriving in Havana before the start of the expedition and can be contacted at any point by mobile phone.

13. Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are organised and reviewed by our partners the University of Havana and are subject to stringent protocols. Transport used to move pupils from various sites have been assessed by the Operations Manager and his team in Cuba and only reputable companies with an excellent safety record are used.

14. Accommodation and camp security

Colony Hotel

Volunteers will sleep in shared (2 – 3 students per room) rooms with fans and private bathroom for all the time on site except for two nights on the Felipe Poey. The hotel has 24 hour security guard coverage.

Felipe Poey live aboard

Accommodation on the live-aboard is split below and above the deck: there are sleeping berths available in both locations so that segregation (e.g. between male and female volunteers) is achievable if required.