



Planning a Coral Reef Field Trip

For children ages 8-12

April 2007

This document has been prepared for dive operators that would like to arrange an educational trip for schoolchildren aged 8-12 years to a local coral reef.

Objective:

To give children the chance to observe first-hand the beauty and diversity of a local coral reef.

After the lesson children will understand that:

1. Coral reefs support a variety of life
2. Coral reefs are formed by tiny animals which are fragile.

Overview:

Children are split into groups of 5-6. Accompanied by a team-leader, they snorkel to 5 different stations marked by small buoys. Each station has a different theme for children to observe and record on the team slate what they see. The station themes are simple but will help children understand the basics of coral reef ecology.

1. Colour: the importance of zooxanthellae algae which gives coral its colour.
2. Shape: how colonies build and the different types of coral.
3. Dead coral: emphasizes the fragility of coral and causes of death of coral.
4. Fish: the variety of fish life supported by the reef.
5. Open observation: allows children to look in detail at their surroundings and notice animals other than fish and coral.

Arrangements with the school:

First speak with the headmaster to see if the school is interested. Don't forget to find out whether the headmaster can swim. If (s)he cannot, (s)he may be uncomfortable with the idea. Find out if any of the teachers can swim who might be interested in coming on the trip. Even if they can't swim, they may enjoy the boat trip and can help with supervision. On the day of the event, the headmasters only responsibility is to take roll. (S)He can snorkel among the various groups or watch from the beach as (s)he prefers.

The school will usually need to send home a permission slip that includes:

1. schedule for the day and a description of activities
2. whether or not lunch is included
3. that there will be activities for non-swimming children
4. assurance that the children will be closely supervised.
5. the children should bring a towel and a change of dry clothing
6. whether the child can swim or not.

Please be clear about the maximum number of children you can fit safely on the boat. Also be clear that you need to know how many children will be there in advance of the day so you can plan for the number of chaperones. We recommend 1 chaperone (preferably Thai speaking) for every 5 children. It is recommended that you provide at least one Thai-speaking chaperone with the non-swimming group.

The Day Before

A. Prepare materials:

- Mask/snorkel (1 for every 2 kids. Children's masks may be too small for some older kids so bring a selection.) Attach snorkels and treat with toothpaste day before.
- 1 slate w/ pencil for each team
- Extra pencils
- Toothpaste
- Life jackets (check one's provided by boat company. Some life jackets that are provided free may be uncomfortable and you may want to bring your own.)
- Water & cups
- Arrangements for lunch
- Bin bag
- Sea Sick bags
- Extra Blankets & Towels
- Film
- Underwater camera
- Fish books
- 5 Marker Buoys with weights
- Whistle with wrist band & watch
- Life preservers, kickboards
- First Aid kit
- Radio
- Optional: Advance team boat, Marine life coloring books & coloring pencils, Colourful Team markers (ribbons or hair ties with safety pins)

Use the checklist to make sure that you have all the items before you leave the site. Keep a list of all borrowed items so that they can be returned with a thank you and maybe a copy of a photo from the big day.

B. Volunteer Assignments & Responsibilities

Head Team Leader: Separates kids into groups and explains what's going on. Talks about the marine life and keeps kids entertained to and from the site.

Team Leaders: Guide the children at the site. Look after the well-being of the kids in their group. Can also be given part of the lecture on the way to the site (i.e. clownfish & anemone's or hard vs. soft coral or snorkel demonstration)

Advance Team (Optional): 2 people to go out to site to set up station buoys. Can then take over as sideline monitors.

Sideline & toothpaste monitors: Troubleshoot and keep general control. Give toothpaste where necessary and escort anyone to shore who needs a break. One monitor is also the timekeeper. The other can be taking underwater photos. Before leaving the site, one of the monitors can check that nothing is left behind.

Shallow water team leaders: Engage children in tide pooling, looking at shells or other shallow water activity

Land photographer: Should try and get 1 group shot, team shots, shots of all volunteers, and a shot of the boat showing the company name and any other logos of sponsoring businesses.

Videographer: Great if you can find one!

Ask all the volunteers for their full names before the event, so you can make certificates later

C. Helpful Hints:

Be prepared for a weather change. If you're in the boat some of the kids may get scared and you'll want to have some games to keep them occupied. Find out in advance what songs they know. We taught the kids "the wave" which they learned and performed in their own Thai style. A goodie bag of cheap little gifts for them to choose from can also do the trick. Games related to what they learned—doing a little quiz within their groups (the waves may be too noisy to do too much with the entire group).

Make sure you have everyone's full name, including the headmaster and ask for a two sentence comment that can be used in a press release.

Day of the event:

1. Advance team—a team of 2 people goes out to the site to set up the buoys. It is helpful if they are in contact with the team leader in case something unexpected has happened.
2. Kids arrive at 9:30. The team should be there by at least 9:00. Expect that the kids will arrive earlier than planned, so some supervision may be required.
3. All materials on checklist are counted. Any forgotten items can be collected at this point.
4. Headmaster takes roll and checks permission slips.
5. Children are divided into swimming and non-swimming and then divided into teams among the chaperones (no more than 5 kids per adult). Groups should have a mixture of ages, so the older children will help take care of the younger ones. Children can also pick a buddy. Children can be given something to identify them as a group—a colored ribbon to tie around their wrist, a hair tie with safety pin.
6. Kids are introduced to their team leader and decide on a team name and have their team photo taken.
7. Board the boat sitting with teams together. Pass out life jackets.
8. If touring in glass bottom boat with explanation of what they are seeing – or use pictures and books to talk to the children about what they will see. Team Leaders point out coral shapes and formations, interesting fish, and dead coral. Explains how coral polyps are small animals that form houses. Also talks about various threats. Books and visual aids are helpful.
9. Arrive at site. Children get out and sit in their teams. Team leaders pass out masks/snorkels, collect slate. If not using advance team, set up marker buoys.
10. Leader briefs children on how to use masks and snorkels (dry demonstration of snorkel clearing). Have children practice.

11. Explains the game: Children should also be briefed not to touch anything and why.
 - Snorkel with team leader to 5 stations: Shape, color, dead, fish, open observation
 - Each station write down what they observe in the area
 - Whistle signals:
 - 1 long whistle = stop and get in your group
 - 2 short whistles = change station

12. Non-swimmers: If shallow area permits they can make similar observations, practice using mask and snorkel and look at objects found on the beach—shells, pieces of dead coral. Also additional support such as, life preservers and kickboards will make the non swimmers more comfortable.

13. Teams move from station to station with team leader when the time keeper blows the whistle every 10 - 15 minutes. Team leaders may choose to take a break on the beach if their kids are tired. Two sideline supports (one is the time keeper) with toothpaste help check for boat traffic and troubleshoot. If any of the kids need to rest, one of the monitors can help the child to shore (coloring books and pens come in handy in this case).

14. After all the teams have completed their rotations, break for lunch and dry off.

15. After lunch, review what the kids reported on their slates.

16. Splash around, dry off and go home. (Count off to make sure everyone is there!)

17. Once back home, give out worksheets & evaluation (if using). Don't forget to have the kids thank the boat captain.

Follow-up Checklist

- Develop film - 2 sets (1 for the school & 1 for your group)
- Send out press release
- Collect copies of homework and get feedback from school - set a date for the next activity
- Thank you notes and pictures to businesses that supported event
- Copies of pictures for volunteers
- Certificates for volunteers

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