

Pacific Islands Research Institute (PIRI)

Island Explorer Expeditions

FAQ's

1. What are Island Explorer expeditions?

Our expeditions are ongoing research projects confronting critical, current issues, run by qualified and respected members of the scientific community. These expeditions are not tours, not ecotourism, not adventure travel. Our expeditions are short-term volunteer opportunities directly assisting scientists in their field research. In some cases, you will be working in areas inaccessible to tourists; pristine regions that only researchers are allowed to enter. Most projects are 10-14 days long, but there are also one-week, three-week, available. The researchers you work with come from all over the globe. They apply to various sources for grants that support their work by simultaneously organizing volunteers to assist them in the field and funding the research. Topics span a wide range of scientific study including ecology, zoology, archaeology, and anthropology.

2. Is this really for me?

PIRI projects are scientific research expeditions, not guided tours. PIRI makes every effort to describe field conditions accurately both in its publications and verbally, but fieldwork in remote locations is a delicate business and prone to last-minute change, flexibility is a must. We accept this as part of what makes an PIRI project a unique experience. We are not in the package holiday business, so if that's what you want, best look elsewhere. But, if you are passionate about joining our team, learning new skills, meeting new people, and making a difference in our world; read on.

3. Do I need any special skills?

No. The researcher(s) and field staff will teach you everything you need to know once you arrive. The majority of tasks are simple, and you will quickly master them. Exceptions may be projects requiring scuba qualifications or high levels of fitness.

4. Do I need any other languages?

The primary language spoken on all our projects is English (on some projects, however, language skills can be a great help to the researcher).

5. I have certain health concerns; can I still join an expedition?

Maybe would have field project to suit you. If you have a physical disability or a specific medical condition, call us and we will do our best to explain the options and challenges. .

6. Do I need to be fit?

Yes, some projects are suitable for every fitness level, but some are more demanding than others; they will vary. Please check with the expedition coordinator and read the medical advisory in the Expedition Briefing carefully for specific details.

7. Can you accommodate special diets?

When working in more remote areas, your diet will reflect what is available locally, and therefore cannot cater to every taste. To be sure that your diet can be accommodated, if possible, check with us first before you join any team. The food varies enormously, depending on availability. No matter what you have for supper, after a full day in the field, the food will taste like heaven.

8. Am I too old?

Never! Volunteers over 80 have enjoyed our projects and have made valuable contributions to the fieldwork. Please be realistic regarding your health and fitness, and always call us for advice.

9. Who else will be on my team?

Volunteers from all parts of the globe join research teams each year. Many volunteers are returning volunteers, and a few have worked on several projects. Volunteers are diverse in age, experience and nationality, and expedition teams are extraordinarily intergenerational. The minimum age is 16, and there is no maximum! 60% of volunteers are female, 40% male. All will share the same spirit of interest and excitement that made them choose the same expedition that you did. They may even become friends for life.

10. What size are the teams?

Research teams are usually small groups of between 4 and 15 people (though there are exceptions). To find out the team size on any project, note the Maximum Team Size with each project description on the web or in the Research and Exploration Guide, or contact us with questions.

11. Do most people travel alone?

You will find some couples or some participants who are traveling together, but the majority of our volunteers travel alone. Our expeditions are a safe way to travel to remote or unfamiliar places because you will be met at the rendezvous site and will soon be part of a team.

12. Are minors (teens) allowed on Island Explorer Expeditions?

Minors (ages 16 to 17) have a history of being enthusiastic and strong contributors to both fieldwork and team dynamics. Minors are welcome to join projects as long as they are 16 years of age by the first day of the team. To help manage group dynamics, minor spaces are often limited to two per team. Some projects, due to site liability issues, are limited to 18 or 21 years of age and older. Please contact an Expedition Coordinator to check on availability for your project.

Special note to parents and minors: It is important to realize that because PIRI projects are designed for adults, there is no special supervision of unaccompanied minors; they are expected to participate and behave as adults.

13. What can I expect in the field?

Our expeditions are not tours. You will live and work and eat as scientists do in the field. That means you will work very hard for long hours doing things you've never done before. You will get rained on but you will be challenged intellectually. So if you want cable TV, piña coladas by the pool, and a quick drive past the sights, this is not for you. But if you crave real contact with real people in other parts of the world, if you dream about seeing the stars without city lights, if you want to hold the handiwork of a prehistoric hunter in your hands, if you want to discover ancient archaeological ruins instead of just making a donation, if you want to come home with your head full of ideas and your heart bursting with purpose, then join an expedition. We have an expedition waiting for your help.

14. What do I need to bring?

Don't worry. The literature (Expedition Briefing) we send you once you register for a team contains a full list of everything that you will need to bring with you. Certain projects may require camping equipment, others specify clothing for certain types of climatic conditions, but most require no more than your favorite pair of tough pants and an old work-shirt.

15. Who leads the project?

All our projects are led by researchers and their field staff. They are not tour leaders. They have years of experience at leading field research teams and each one has developed his or her own leadership style. They all share an enthusiasm and passion for their subject that you will find infectious, and they value your work and your questions.

16. Research Sites

Our teams work in some of the most interesting places on Earth and some of the most remote islands of the Pacific. The intense, hands-on connection you get with your site will give you an appreciation of the Earth's richness and quiet majesty that no guard-railed vista can match. But it's more than just the physical place. On a PIRI project you have one-on-one contact with the local people that no tourist will ever have.

17. Tasks (the field work)

The tasks for each project are described in detail in the Expedition Briefing. The range of tasks on our expeditions is enormous. You might be counting fish on a coral reef or recording the mating rituals of monkeys. You might be interviewing poor farmers or homeless women. You might be using a gravity meter, a satellite tracking system, or a pair of tweezers and a magnifying glass. You might be whisking the dust off of a bowl that was last seen by an ancient people or videotaping a ceremony that will teach young tribes people their own traditions while preserving a record for future generations. No matter what the task involved, you do not need any special skills. We will teach you what you need to do when you arrive in the field. And no matter what your native skills are, you can put them to good use. In fact, you will undoubtedly find skills you never knew you had. The world (and you) will be better for it.

18. Accommodations

Imagine, if you will, waking up in a cot under the open sky on a remote beach, watching dolphins leaping as dawn breaks. The accommodations on PIRI projects range from condos to hammocks to college dorm rooms. There are scientific field stations on mountaintops and tents in the rain forest, country inns and formal hotels. There may be hot showers or a bucket of cold water. There may be private bathrooms or pit toilets. Please see the on-line project descriptions. In all cases, we try to provide the most comfortable facilities available at a given research site, while trying to keep participation within the economic reach of the largest number of people.

19. What about local customs?

Many projects work in remote communities; some far off the beaten track. We stress the need for responsible behavior and common courtesy when traveling in these areas. When in doubt about what will, or will not, cause offense, be sure to ask your researcher or field staff. Learn to respect local customs. Involvement in other cultures is one of the privileges of joining a PIRI expedition.

20. Will I have time to take photographs?

Of course. PIRI expeditions enable you to get close to the action, and opportunities for photography or video are endless. Two things to remember: first, and most important, always ask permission before taking photos. Many local people find photography intrusive, so always ask your researcher or field staff if it would be appropriate.

21. Will I have any time off?

Yes. Fieldwork is not all hard work. The researcher will often designate a day or two off during the project and recommend a number of local sights and attractions nearby that would be worth a visit. Or, you might just like to kick up your heels and lie on a hammock with a good book. The choice is yours.

22. Getting to and from the research site.

There are set rendezvous locations and times for all PIRI expeditions. Your researcher or one of the field staff will meet you. Usually, the rendezvous is at the nearest international or regional airport. In some cases, though, getting to the destination can be a challenge even for intrepid travelers. While some find this part of the project fun, it can be daunting for others. Check the rendezvous location on each project write-up and call for details if you have any concerns or questions.

23. Who books my travel?

You do. While your Expedition Coordinator will be able to offer suggestions, part of preparing yourself for a PIRI expedition comes in getting yourself to and from the rendezvous. You are free to make your travel arrangements to the project rendezvous site, as specified in the project Expedition Briefing, with any travel agency you normally would choose.

24. When should I book my travel?

Book early. Start making inquiries about your flights as soon as your place on a project is confirmed with the Expedition Coordinator and you have read the Expedition Briefing. Airlines can get booked up months in advance, especially if you are planning to travel at peak times (June - August and the Christmas/New Year period). In addition, we recommend that you make sure the tickets are refundable or open ended. Though rare, there is always a possibility that team dates could change.

25. What about travel insurance?

We strongly recommend volunteers take out trip cancellation insurance. Your travel agent should be able to give recommendations. Please note that your travel arrangements are subject to the terms and conditions of the travel agency through which you make your booking. PIRI can take no responsibility for any cancellation or amendment penalties that may arise. On rare occasions that teams and/or expeditions have to be canceled by PIRI we will refund your Share of Costs, but PIRI is not responsible for non-refundable airline or other tickets or payments or any similar penalties that may be incurred. It is your responsibility to protect yourself against airline and travel agency cancellation fees by taking out appropriate travel insurance.

Please note: US Volunteers will be automatically billed for our mandatory medical evacuation insurance. In addition to this, we strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance.

26. Can I stay longer or leave early?

You cannot stay on the project longer than your team or leave before the team's completion. However, many people choose to travel elsewhere in the country either before or after the project. We generally suggest planning extra travel time for after the expedition. Often the researcher or local staff will be able to advise you on where to go and what to see.

27. What about visas?

You are responsible for arranging your visa. If you have to apply for a visa for your project, allow plenty of time, and always ask for a tourist visa. Likewise, when you go through immigration checkpoints, state that you are on vacation so that you are not required to obtain a work permit.

28. How do I become an Island Explorer and part of a team?

Step One: Choose your project and team dates and remember to choose an alternate in case your first choice is full. Some team sizes are as small as four volunteers per team, so certain teams do fill fast. It is important to send in your form or call us early since we register team members in the order their reservations are received.

Step Two: Reserve your place by sending the completed reservation form to our office, together with your deposit \$300 U.S (for US volunteers the full Share of Costs required if booking under 90 days before your team fields). AUD\$500 Australia, or £200 Europe.

Or, you can use your credit card to reserve your place by phone or fax. If you want to sign up electronically, please use the secure online site or email our office

Step Three: We will send you a full volunteer packet and an Expedition Briefing containing detailed information on the expedition. Please read it carefully and send in your forms as soon as possible.

Step Four: You must book your travel yourself, but we will provide every assistance (See "Getting to and from the research site"). Travel costs are not included in your expedition's Share of Cost. For US Volunteers the balance of the Share of Cost is due in full 90 days prior to your team's start date.

Step Five: You join your team in the field. It's as easy as that!

29. How should I choose an expedition?

You will find details of every expedition on the our website (continuously updated). The web site allows readers to search the expeditions by month, area of interest, and geographical region. You can also contact us. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **By Location & Date:** Depending on researchers needs, there are teams departing throughout the year. Expeditions are ongoing in more than 4 different countries. To accommodate the time you have available, be aware that teams vary in length from one week to three weeks.
- **By Subject:** Check the site for a full listing by research subject. The expedition descriptions give essential information about the research and goals. You will find more information in the Expedition Briefing.
- **By Cost:** The Share of Cost for each expedition is listed after each description. The cost per team may vary with team dates and length. If you have any question, please check with the Expedition Coordinator.
- **By Field Conditions:** Accommodations, food, and level of fitness required vary considerably from expedition to expedition, but there is something for every taste, from camping to hotels. For more help in choosing an expedition that is right for you, check the Field Conditions section of the expedition description or call the nearest office.

30. What does the Share of Cost (SOC) cover?

Projects range from US\$8,000 to US\$14,000 per person excluding travel to and from the rendezvous. The price of each project, which we call your Share of Cost (SOC), covers your food, accommodation, on-site travel (not airfare), and all of the various costs of field research (field permits, equipment, etc.). These costs may vary for each expedition and individual team so please check prior to making your reservation or call the Expedition Coordinator if you have any questions. The SOC's shown on each page are the lowest available in each case and are subject to change.

- **How are funds distributed?**

Through a unique method of funding, 100% of your contribution is used to support research and exploration sponsored by PIRI . By balancing costs across our program, we are able to assist some research that would not be self-supporting. Depending on the size and needs of your team, roughly 50% goes to field costs; 34% to advance planning, reconnaissance, team recruitment, and logistical support; and 16% is used for administrative support, communications, and post expedition follow-up.

- **What other expenses will I have to pay?**

The main additional costs will be your transportation expenses to and from the rendezvous site. This means that airfares are not covered by the SOC. Additional costs may include passports, visas, airport taxes, and the costs of any side trips made during time off from the expedition. Some expeditions have additional in-country travel costs to reach the research site. Ask your Expedition Coordinator for details.

Please note: US Volunteers will be automatically billed for our mandatory medical evacuation insurance. In addition to this, we strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance.

- **Benefits for past volunteers or groups:**

Past volunteers may receive a reduction in their Share of Cost. Benefits are not cumulative. Please remember that even when traveling as a family, all volunteers must be at least 16 years of age.

- **Is there any financial assistance for teachers or students?**

Possibly. Some grants are available for teachers applying for expeditions.

- **When do I pay the full Share of Cost?**

If you Reserve Your Space 90 days or more before the team fields, the remainder of the balance is due at 90 days and will be solicited through monthly invoices or is payable at any time directly through your Expedition Coordinator. The full Share of Cost is required if reserving a space under 90 days before the team's start date. You can pay either by check or with most major credit cards. We also accept transfers of most US securities.

You may wish to consider starting an Expedition Fund (U.S. and Canada only). This fund—sort of an expedition lay-away plan—allows you to make contributions of \$300 or more at any time for future expeditions you might wish to join. U.S. citizens take the tax deduction in the year they make the contribution. There are certain restrictions and limitations. Please ask your Expedition Coordinator for additional information.

31. If my plans change, can I cancel?

Yes. Outside of 90 days from your team start date we assure full refunds less a handling charge. After that, it costs us to replace you because we have already sent advances from your contributions to the field. Cancellation and Transfer Policies:

- **Cancellations ninety (90) days or more prior to team start date:** Payments are 100% refundable less \$100 handling fee. If transferring to another project or opening an Expedition Fund, 100% credit, no handling fee.

- **Cancellations between forty-five (45) and eighty-nine (89) days prior to team departure:** Deposit payment of \$1,000 U.S. is non-refundable; all other payments are refundable. If transferring to another project or opening an Expedition Fund, 100% credit, no handling fee..

- **Cancellations less than forty-five (45) days prior to team departure:** No refunds, transfers, or Expedition Fund credits. All payments are non-refundable and non-transferable unless due to denied acceptance on project by PIRI. Trip cancellation insurance is recommended.

- **Note on Expedition Funds:** All payments received through past Expedition Fund Appeals are considered donations to PIRI and are non-refundable under any circumstance.

32. Are my project costs tax-deductible?

Each country has a different set of tax rulings.

U.S.A.: In the United States, Pacific Islands Research Institute (PIRI) is a public charity described under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It is not a private foundation, as it is an organization described in Section 509(a)(1) and 170(b)(1)(A)(VI) of the Internal Revenue Code. In general, contributions of cash, securities and property donated by US citizens to support scientific research projects sponsored by PIRI are tax-deductible. Note: Contributions of cash or securities to a charitable organization are tax deductible only upon completion of giving. As such, your payment(s) towards a PIRI expedition may be tax deductible only after such payment(s) is non-refundable or, in other words, 45 days before your team start date (Share of Cost is no longer refundable). Under certain circumstances, volunteers may deduct reasonable out-of-pocket expenses associated with their participation in a PIRI expedition including the \$39 mandatory health insurance and some expenses for transportation to and from the research site. **AS WITH ALL TAX MATTERS, PLEASE CONSULT YOUR PERSONAL TAX ADVISOR ON ALL ISSUES CONCERNING TAX DEDUCTIBILITY.** To learn more about our Expedition Fund Program for US and Canada residents only, please contact your Expedition Coordinator.

33. How can I get more information?

Give us a call: Our experienced staff is ready to help answer any questions that you may have. Once you have decided to join a project, your Expedition Coordinator will take care of you every step of the way. Contact us

Expedition Briefing: For most expeditions, an abbreviated briefing can be found online as a PDF document by clicking on the link on the lower right hand corner of the web page describing that expedition. The more detailed printed Expedition Briefing can be

sent to you upon request, or automatically upon payment of a deposit. Each Expedition Briefing (25–50 pages) includes a history of the expedition, its research mission, background of the researcher(s) and staff, expedition goals, field logistics, reference Maps, in-country information, and a bibliography of materials. Call or email to order an Expedition Briefing.

For instance:

Raivavae has had very little field work performed since 1956. E. Edwards surveyed and located over 600 archaeological sites during 2 periods 1986-87 and 1991. Researching and excavating these sites will lend a great deal of further insight on the Chronology of the Eastern Pacific Colonization patterns as they relate to the inhabitants of Easter Island and the rest of eastern Polynesia. We plan to do field work and excavations over at least 3 seasons, analyzing and compiling data between the field work periods. The significance cannot be over stated. We hope to be able to link the Pitcairn's early settlers (pre-Bounty) to Mangareva and Easter Island to Raivavae, showing that they were an advanced sea faring culture that traded thru out the entire region. We also hope to discover fossil records of extinct plant and animal species as yet unknown. The sheer natural beauty of Raivavae cannot be overstated, the Polynesian peoples their isolated lifestyle, plus the archaeologists themselves are great characters, entertaining, informative and with a scope of knowledge of the area that is mind boggling.

PASSPORT INFORMATION:

Renew/Apply for your US Passport OR Apply for a Travel Visa with PassportVisaExpress!

www.PassportVisaExpress.com