



# REEFhabilitation

Rebuilding reefs together

## Do You Love the Ocean?

### Have you ever wanted to dive in and help keep our ocean healthy?

The **REEFhabilitation** experience is a hands-on learning adventure where you can actively participate in coral restoration. Established by nonprofit organizations **The Nature Conservancy**, **Fundemar** and **Grupo Puntacana Foundation**, this half-day program invites you to join our efforts to rebuild the coral reefs of tomorrow!

While enjoying snorkeling or diving, **REEFhabilitation** is an opportunity to learn about coral restoration and visit coral nurseries or reef restoration sites. In the Dominican Republic, your local dive shop can offer this experience in Bayahibe and Puntacana. Your involvement supports coral reef restoration, as 5% of the **REEFhabilitation** proceeds goes directly to local organizations that manage coral nurseries and lead restoration efforts. Together, we can do our part to help create healthier, more resilient reefs.



### WHAT IS A CORAL?

Corals are living animals that boast a range of vibrant colors and grow in many shapes and sizes—from orange, rock-like ones with textured grooves to purple, fan-like ones that sway gently with the waves. Corals can form reef structures that can grow large enough to be seen from space. An example of a reef-building coral is the Caribbean’s iconic—and endangered—elkhorn coral, with its large, orange, antler-like branches reaching out towards the surface of the water.

Most reef-building corals have an important relationship with a type of algae called zooxanthellae. The algae live within the tissue of the coral where they gain protection while in turn providing a food source for the coral through photosynthesis, or using sunlight to produce nutrients. It is this process that allows corals to grow fast enough to build large reefs and also gives corals their unique colors.

PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM Young corals are transferred from a nursery to a damaged reef in Bayahibe, Dominican Republic. © Paul A. Selvaggio; Parrotfish swim through healthy elkhorn corals. © Shane Gross; Brain corals are important for building strong reefs. © iStockphoto

## WHAT IS A CORAL NURSERY?

A coral nursery is a man-made underwater array of small fragments of corals that are grown for the purpose of planting onto a deteriorated, or dead, reef structure. These corals are usually replicates, or clones, of their parents, having been carefully clipped from currently living corals. The fragments are grown to a particular size, which ensures they are healthy and stable enough to be transplanted to a reef. There are often hundreds of coral fragments in a nursery!

Coral nurseries have been used worldwide by conservationists and although they are effective at growing corals, they do require frequent maintenance. Corals must be cleaned of algae that tries to overgrow it and monitored for disease outbreaks. Once the corals leave the nursery and are transplanted to the reef—a process called outplanting—scientists and experts from local conservation organizations continue to monitor their health and growth rates.



**In the Dominican Republic, our underwater nurseries house endangered staghorn corals and are designed to provide optimal conditions for growth. The nursery corals have access to**

**nutrients from the water, exposure to sunlight to help them grow, and maintenance from local organizations and volunteers to reduce predation and harmful sediments.**

## WHY DO WE NEED CORAL REEF RESTORATION?

Did you know that about 60% of living coral cover in the Caribbean has disappeared in just the last three decades, and seven coral species are threatened or endangered? Due to a changing climate largely driven by human activities, corals need our help to adapt and become more resilient. Since coral reefs provide so many important benefits—including protection for vulnerable coastlines, habitat for fish that feed communities, and tranquil beaches that help support responsible tourism—they are vital to the wellbeing of both nature and people! To secure a future for coral



reefs, it is essential and urgent that we restore and protect them. We must all get involved to help stop their rapid and alarming decline.

### **REEFhabilitation**

directly impacts vital coral restoration efforts by donating 5% of the program's proceeds

to support the long-term health of coral nurseries maintained by local organizations. It also fosters awareness among those who love and depend on the ocean about the importance of coral reefs in keeping our waters healthy and thriving. By combining fun and responsible underwater adventure with hands-on conservation education, **REEFhabilitation** promotes stronger coral reefs today and into the future.

## How can I participate?

Through the **REEFhabilitation** experience, snorkelers or SCUBA divers can take part in hands-on experiential learning and tour coral nurseries or outplanting sites. Advanced SCUBA divers can participate in cleaning coral nurseries, recording monitoring data like coral growth and outplanting corals to reefs.

Connect with your local dive operator for more details on how to take part in **REEFhabilitation**—and get ready to dive in, explore the beauty of the ocean and help protect the future of coral reefs!



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