

# Akumal Bay Leadership in Action

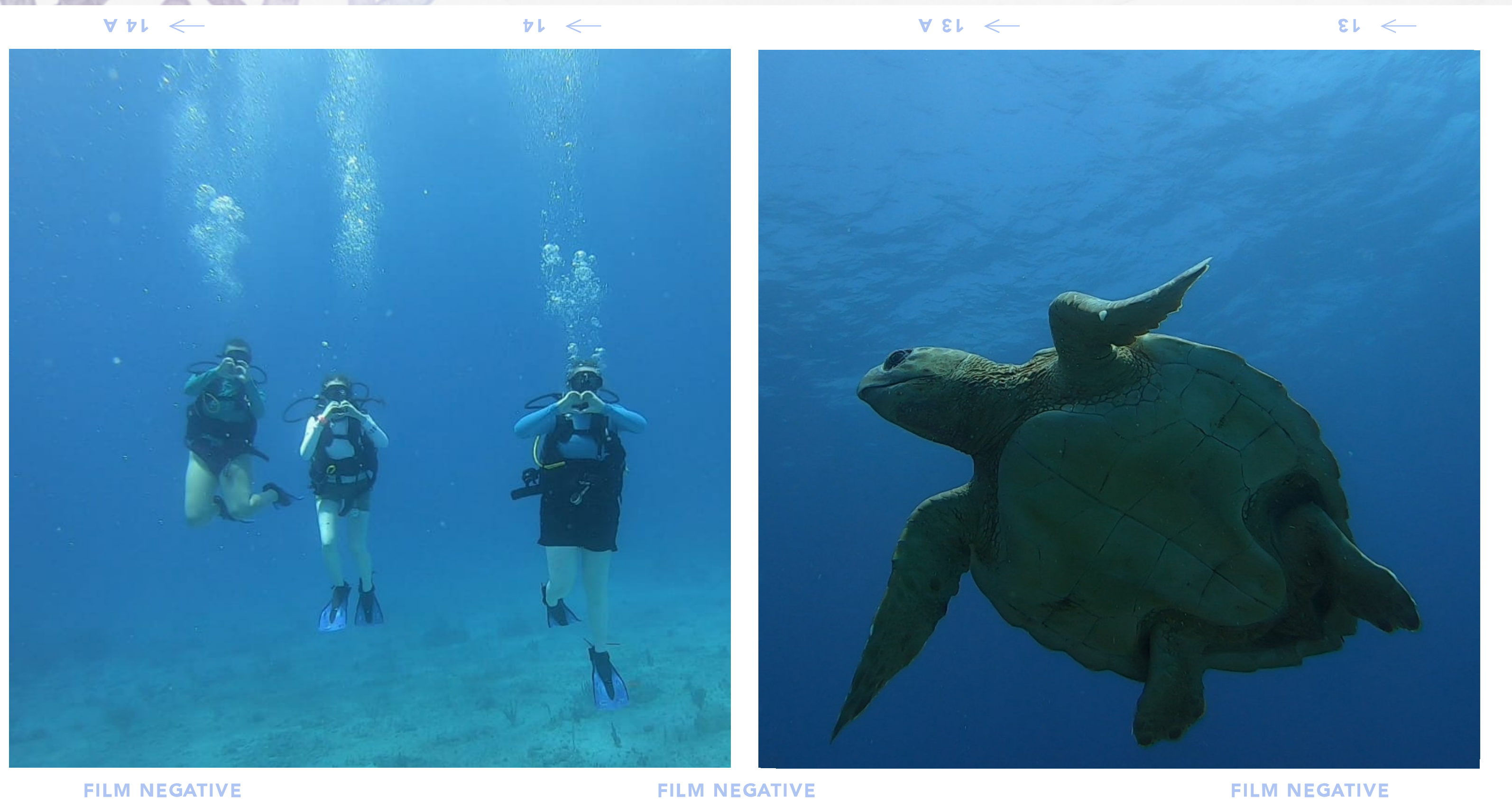
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## Introduction

After a summer of researching the effects of climate change on coral reefs, I decided to gain hands-on experience in the field. This allowed me to apply my research practically and step away from my desk. I joined Operation Wallacea on a project investigating the influence of tourism on sea turtle behavior. This intrigued me because, after extensive research on how human activities affect coral reefs, I was eager to explore their impact on other ecosystem-dependent creatures. It felt like the next natural step. Before embarking on this journey, I spent two weeks refining my previous summer's research and familiarizing myself with Akumal Bay. No amount of reading could fully prepare me for the adventures that awaited.

## Experience

During my first week in Mexico, I worked toward my PADI dive qualification. As a first-time scuba diver, I encountered the steep learning curve they talk about encountering your Leadership in Action. However, after obtaining my PADI certification, I was able to assist researchers in collecting data on sea turtle behavior. This involved hours of tracking sea turtles and recording their activities. I also learned to perform underwater quadrats, transects, and identify fish and corals beneath the waves. While I had similar experiences on land as part of my degree, this underwater work felt like learning those skills anew.



## Research

During my collaboration with Operation Wallacea (Opwall) at the Akumal Bay Dive and Research Centre, I had the opportunity to contribute to research on the impact of tourism on common green sea turtles. This research aimed to understand how human activities, such as tourism, affected these endangered creatures and their nesting habitats. Through data collection and analysis, our efforts not only contributed to the global conservation of these magnificent turtles but also had a positive impact on the local community. By shedding light on the potential threats posed by tourism, we helped implement sustainable practices and raised awareness among tourists and locals alike. This research ultimately fostered a sense of responsibility and cooperation within the community, ensuring a more promising future for both the common green sea turtles and the people who call Akumal Bay home.

## Conclusion

From my time working with Operation Wallacea (Opwall) at the Akumal Bay Dive and Research Centre, I have learned invaluable lessons about the intricate dynamics of conservation, particularly in the context of tourism and its effects on endangered species like common green sea turtles. This experience has underscored the critical importance of data-driven research, community involvement, and sustainable practices in safeguarding our planet's fragile ecosystems. Moving forward, I am committed to carrying these lessons into my future endeavors by actively participating in conservation initiatives, raising awareness about responsible tourism, and promoting environmentally friendly choices in my personal and professional life. This experience has left an indelible mark on my commitment to the preservation of our natural world, motivating me to contribute actively to the harmony between human activities and the environment.

