

Guided by island traditional wisdom, Polynesian canoe voyage seeks to highlight need for action to safeguard the planet

Using only traditional navigation methods, a group of navigators from the Polynesian Voyaging Society have embarked on a three-year canoe voyage around the world to spotlight the need for sustainable solutions to global challenges.

The Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage will cover 47,000 nautical miles using only the signs of the waves, winds and stars to find their way around the Earth.

The launch of the voyage on 17 May in Honolulu, Hawaii, coincides with the month that marks the International Day of Biological Diversity, whose theme this year focuses on island biodiversity.

The Hōkūleʻa canoe will sail from Hawaii to Tahiti in the first leg of the trip and is expected to arrive in Apia, Samoa, in time for the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States in early September.

Under the theme of “sustainable development of small island States through genuine and durable partnerships,” the Conference will seek to ensure economic growth and social development while protecting the environment and increasing countries’ resilience.

“Living on an island chain teaches us that our natural world is a gift with limits and that we must carefully steward this gift if we are to survive together,” the crew said in a statement.

“The Worldwide Voyage is a means by which we now engage all of Island Earth—practicing how to live sustainably, while sharing, learning, creating global relationships, and discovering the wonders of this precious place we all call home.”

The navigators will bring the stories of islands and oceans to inspire leaders to take action to protect these critical resources. The Hōkūleʻa and Hikianalia crew will then carry this message to 26 countries and 85 communities, including 12 of UNESCO’s Marine World Heritage sites, through June 2017.

The Hawaiian name for the voyage, Mālama Honua, means “to care for our Earth.” The Hōkūleʻa canoe will be accompanied by its sister canoe the Hikianalia which is also its modern-day counterpart. Equipped with state-of-the-art communications technology, like Google Hangout capabilities, the Hikianalia will document the worldwide voyage and share it with the rest of the world.

The voyage also coincides with the International Year of Small Island Developing States, which celebrates the contributions that this group of countries has made to the world.