



Whale Watching Expedition in Seychelles



Whales and dolphins are among the most intriguing and exciting animals on the planet. Just a few degrees south of the Equator, Seychelles is rich in marine mammals—including the most fascinating of them: Sperm whales, Pilot whales, Bryde's whales, Bottlenose, Spinner dolphins (often associated with Melon-headed whales), and many more like Pygmy Blue whales, Orcas and Beaked Whales.

This is no ordinary cruise, but an expedition for nature lovers eager to get closer to these magnificent creatures. Aboard M.Y. Basilisk, we'll spend four days exploring whale and dolphin feeding and breeding grounds in Seychelles. Using small boats, we'll carefully approach the animals—and may even snorkel alongside them if they're comfortable. Marine Mammal Specialist Michel Vély will join us, offering insights into their biology and habitat.

We'll spend four more days among Seychelles' ancient inner islands—granite formations 650 million years old, brimming with near-pristine tropical beauty. On land, we'll encounter giant tortoises, seabird colonies, mangrove forests, and breathtaking views of secluded bays. In the water, we'll snorkel and dive among vibrant reef life, including tropical fish, sea turtles, rays, and friendly reef sharks.

In November 2021, we participated in the filming of *Blue Whales: Return of the Giants*, shot over 21 days in the Seychelles region, where we observed a remarkable diversity and abundance of whales. Building on this experience, in October 2023, we conducted our first whale-watching expedition for tourists, which proved a great success with numerous whale sightings over several days, accompanied by immersive exploration of Seychelles' granite islands and natural wonders. In March 2025 we observed during 5 days in the same area Sperm and Pilot whales as well as dolphins and beaked whales.



Dates for our next Whale Watching Expedition

15th - 24th Nov 2025

9th - 18th April 2026

1st - 10th March 2026

24th Nov - 3rd of Dec 2026

Marine Mammal Specialist onboard – Michel Vély

Michel Vély, a French marine mammal specialist and veterinarian, has studied marine mammals and whale sharks—both in the wild and in captivity—since 1979. He specializes in satellite telemetry to study the movements of large cetaceans such as Humpback and Sperm whales in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, Comoros) and the Caribbean (Anguilla Bank), as well as of whale sharks in Djibouti.

He is currently the French delegate of the International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee and a member of the Stranding Experts Panel at the International Whaling Commission. For more than 25 years now he is the chairman of the French NGO, MEGAPTERA, and advises governments of Small Island Developing States for whale and dolphin procedures and marine mammals research and conservation measures.

Michel has authored scientific publications, contributed to films and guidebooks on cetaceans and whale sharks, and conducted global training on responsible whale and dolphin watching.



Itinerary

Day 1

Embarkation

Mahé is the largest granite island in Seychelles, covering about 150 sq km and home to 85% of the nation's population. This mountainous island is cloaked in tropical vegetation and features a remarkably preserved natural environment.

Morning embarkation takes place at Eden Marina followed by a welcome briefing with the captain. At noon, we set sail northwards to Denis Island. En route, we will pause for a refreshing swim during sunset in the Indian Ocean.

We anchor near Denis Island for the night. A Creole-inspired welcome barbecue will be served on board, followed by an introductory lecture on the whales we aim to encounter during the days ahead.



Whales and Dolphins (Denis Island)

We begin our whale-watching expedition near Denis Island.

Seychelles' islands fall into two main geological groups: the granitic islands, such as Mahé, Praslin, Curieuse, La Digue, and Aride, which are over 650 million years old, and the coralline islands, like Denis, composed of either uplifted reef or sandy cays.

Denis lies 95 km north of Mahé and marks the northernmost point of the coralline group. It sits near the edge of the Mahé Plateau, an underwater shelf less than 100m deep, which abruptly plunges into waters thousands of meters deep. This drop-off zone is a feeding ground for many species of marine mammals, making it ideal for whale and dolphin sightings.

Over these four days, guided by marine mammal specialist Michel Vély, we will explore this area by vessel and zodiac, with the chance for in-water observation under strict guidelines. Sightings may include sperm whales, beaked whales, pilot whales, spinner dolphins, and more.

In the evening of day 5, we say farewell to the whales and dolphins off Denis Island as we start sailing south towards our next destination – Aride Island.

Days 2-5



Itinerary

Day 6

Aride

We arrive at Aride at first light and disembark on this secluded island nature reserve, known for its biodiversity and limited visitor access due to ongoing scientific research.

Accompanied by a local ranger, we enter the forest to observe a rich variety of seabirds and five endemic land birds—including the Seychelles Warbler, with a population of about 2,000. Similar to the Galapagos, birds here show little fear of humans, allowing for intimate observation of nesting behavior. We continue along the trail to the summit, where towering cliffs offer panoramic views over the Indian Ocean. From here, hundreds of seabirds—especially frigatebirds with 2-meter wingspans—soar on ocean winds. These agile birds can chase others midair until they regurgitate their catch, which the frigatebird snatches in flight—a spectacular display of aerial agility.

Aride is also the sole natural home of the endangered Wright's Gardenia (*Rothmannia annae*), a white, fragrant flowering tree.

After returning to the shore, we'll enjoy a barbecue lunch on the beach, followed by snorkeling around Aride's coral reef, home to more than 400 fish species. We anchor for the night nearby. After dinner, we gather for an evening lecture session.



Day 7

Praslin

During breakfast, we set sail to Praslin, Seychelles' second-largest inhabited island. Discovered in 1744 by French explorer Lazare Picault and originally named "Isle des Palmes," the island remains renowned for its lush vegetation and natural beauty.

After disembarking, we explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Vallée de Mai, a prehistoric palm forest where the famous Coco de Mer grows. These ancient trees produce the largest seed in the plant kingdom—up to 15 kg—and are known for their uniquely shaped double coconuts.

Walking under 30m-tall palms with 8m-long leaves, we'll explore the primeval atmosphere of the reserve. You may spot the elusive Seychelles black parrot—the only parrot species endemic to the country, with a population of just a few hundred.

Later, we rest at Baie Ste Anne and can browse a local market. After a late lunch on board, we cruise to Anse Lazio in northern Praslin. Often listed among the world's most beautiful beaches, Anse Lazio is ideal for swimming, snorkeling amid granite rock formations and vibrant marine life. After dinner, we'll hold another engaging lecture session.



Itinerary

Day 8

Curieuse & St Pierre

At sunrise, we anchor off Curieuse Island, home only to conservation rangers. This protected natural park is a sanctuary for the Aldabra giant tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*), which roams freely along the beaches and forest trails. These gentle giants can weigh up to 250 kg and live well over a century. We'll also visit a nursery for juvenile tortoises, where they are raised safely until ready to return to the wild.

Our walk continues through a mangrove forest—a unique salt-tolerant ecosystem teeming with life. Look out for the large Mangrove crab (*Cardisoma carnifex*), whose claws can reach 30 cm in span. The trail ends with a viewpoint offering a sweeping vista over the island.

At its far end, Curieuse reveals beaches adorned with surreal granite formations, where coconut palms lean dramatically towards the sea. We'll relax here before returning to the vessel for lunch.

In the afternoon, we'll snorkel or dive around the small but iconic St. Pierre Island, whose jagged granite spires and palm crowns rising from turquoise waters are emblematic of Seychelles.

Evening lecture onboard after dinner.



La Digue & Ave Maria Rocks

After an early breakfast, we disembark at La Digue, Seychelles' third-most populated island. Our morning begins with a visit to Anse Source d'Argent—often cited as one of the most photogenic beaches in the world, thanks to its dramatic granite boulders, shallow turquoise lagoons, and powdery white sands.

We then proceed to Union Estate, where we'll witness traditional copra (dried coconut) processing, stroll through vanilla plantations, and see colonial-era architecture.

Our visit continues to a panoramic viewpoint overlooking several inner islands, before heading into the Veuve Reserve, a nature park where we may spot the rare Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone corvina*), with its glossy plumage and long tail feathers.

In the afternoon, we sail to the Ave Maria rocks for more snorkeling opportunities. These striking granite formations rise abruptly from the sea and provide a final chance to appreciate Seychelles' unique island geology and marine biodiversity.

After dinner, we gather for a final evening lecture. While sailing among the inner islands, we may encounter schools of friendly Indo-Pacific dolphins, known for their acrobatic displays.

Disembarkation

Early morning on day 10 we set sail to Mahé. Disembarkation at the Inter-Island Quay at 08:30 hrs.

Days 9-10



How the Whale Watching Expedition Works

We are now entering one of the key feeding and breeding grounds for cetaceans in Seychelles. Over the coming days, our vessel M.Y Basilisk will navigate this region in search of whales and dolphins, guided by a team of marine mammal experts.

When a sighting occurs, we will first observe from the main vessel, collecting data and photographs to aid in scientific research. Whenever conditions are safe and suitable, we'll deploy small boats to carefully approach the animals. In exceptional circumstances, participants may even have the opportunity to snorkel alongside these magnificent creatures, witnessing them underwater in their natural habitat—a rare and unforgettable privilege.

Throughout the expedition, we will carry out important scientific work. This includes:

- Photographic Identification: Capturing and cataloguing images of individuals based on distinctive features.
- Acoustic Monitoring: Deploying hydrophones to record and analyze whale and dolphin vocalizations.
- Biopsy Sampling: When feasible, collecting small skin samples to determine gender, genetic profile, diet, and pollutant exposure.
- Satellite Tagging: Attempting to equip certain individuals with tracking devices to monitor their movements over time.



Evenings onboard will be dedicated to engaging lectures on cetacean biology and behavior, as well as workshops where we'll review the day's photos and videos. Guests will learn how to identify different species, interpret their sounds, and contribute to building a photographic identification catalogue.

Your safety and comfort remain our top priority. All activities are carefully planned and carried out under the guidance of the expedition leader and marine specialists. Itineraries are flexible and may change depending on weather and sea conditions.





What Whales & Dolphins will we look for?

This region is rich in cetacean life, offering some of the most exciting whale and dolphin encounters in the Indian Ocean. From playful dolphins to the planet's largest animal—the Blue whale—this area is a biological hotspot. Among the highlights we hope to observe are Orcas, Pygmy Blue Whales and the rarely seen Longman's beaked whale, a true gem for marine wildlife enthusiasts.

Based on previous expeditions, here are the species we will be looking out for:

Large whales

Large toothed whales;

- Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

Large baleen whales:

- Bryde's whale *Balaenoptera brydei*
- Pygmy Blue whale *Balaenoptera musculus breviceuda*
- Minke whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*
- Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*
- Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*

Medium and small whales

- Orca or Killer whale *Orcinus orca*
- False killer whale *Pseudorca crassidens*
- Pygmy killer whale *Feresa attenuata*
- Short-finned pilot whale *Globicephala macrorhyncus*
- Pygmy sperm whale *Kogia breviceps*
- Dwarf sperm whale *Kogia sima*
- Longman's beaked whale *Indopacetus pacificus*
- Blainville's beaked whale *Mesoplodon densirostris*

Small cetaceans off the Mahé Plateau: deep depth waters

- Spinner dolphin *Stenella longirostris*
- Pantropical spotted dolphin *Stenella attenuata*
- Common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*
- Melon-headed whale *Peponocephala electra*
- Fraser's dolphin *Lagenodelphis hosei*
- Rough-toothed dolphin *Steno bredanensis*
- Risso's dolphin *Grampus griseus*



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Silhouette Cruises Whale Watching Cruise require a minimum number of 6 guests in order to depart.

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