



# Silhouette Cruises

## Whale Watching Expedition in Seychelles



### INTRODUCTION

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

Records from the 1960's Russian whaling fleet showed large numbers of whales in the Seychelles waters. In recent years, more and more whales are being spotted in the Seychelles waters. In November 2021 we, from our vessel, had the opportunity to participate in the production of the movie *"Blue Wales Return of the Giants"*, which took place in the Seychelles region; <https://bluewhalesfilm.com/>. The production was done over 21 days. During that time we witnessed a variety of whales, in large numbers. In October 2023, we conducted our first touristic whale expedition in the Seychelles, which was a success. We again witnessed a large number of whales including the blue whales.

The blue whales, the largest animal that ever existed on planet Earth, are making their home in the Seychelles islands waters. Their audio signatures, was recorded by scientists, revealed that they appear to spend several months in our area. Their very low frequency songs could be heard primarily during March and April. The scientist believe that the Seychelles could be really important for blue whales. "They sing during the breeding season and we think it's probably the males who are singing, based on what we know about other whales, explained Dr Kate Stafford, from the Marine Mammals Institute, of Oregon State University, a lead researcher on one research expedition. *"So there's also a potential that the Seychelles is a breeding area or a nursery area"*.

The Seychelles waters used to have a large population of Blue Whales many years ago, but their population were decimated by Russian commercial whaling fleets in the 1960's. So their come back is seen as a great win for conservation.

This is not a regular cruise, but an expedition for enthusiastic nature lovers, who are keen to get closer than ever to those magnificent creatures. Sailing on M.V Maya's Dugong, we will spend four days looking for whales and dolphins in feeding and breeding areas in Seychelles. We will hop on small boats, approaching the animals carefully and even snorkeling next to them, if they are happy with us. We will get a better understanding of their biology and habitat through the guidance of the experienced Marine Mammal Specialist, Michel Vély, who is joining us.

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We will spend another four days in the inner islands of Seychelles, 650 million years old granite islands, which have an almost pristine tropical splendor. We will discover its life onshore, from giant tortoises and seabird colonies to mangrove forests and breath-taking views of secluded bays. In the water, we will snorkel and dive in an abundance of tropical fish, sea turtles, a variety of rays, and sharks (small and friendly) living amongst the granite rocks and corals.

**We now offer new dates for our whales expedition in 2024 and 2025**

**(30th September to 9th October 2024 and 21st to 30th January 2025)**

**Marine Mammal Specialist onboard – Michel Vély** Michel Vély, from France, is a passionate marine mammal specialist and veterinarian. He has been studying the biology of marine mammals and whale sharks, in captivity and in the wild, since 1979. He is specialized in satellite telemetry on large cetaceans such as Humpback whales and Sperm whales in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, Comoros) and in the Caribbean (Anguilla Bank) as well as on whale sharks (Djibouti). He is currently Chief Veterinary Officer of Saint-Martin. French delegate of the International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee and the representative for the Caribbean region at the International Whaling Commission Stranding Experts Panel. For 25 years now he is the chairman of the French NGO, MEGAPTERA, and advises governments of Small Island Developing States for whales and dolphins' procedures and marine mammals conservation measures.

Michel Vély is the author of scientific publications on marine mammals and whale sharks and has participated in movies and guide books about research and conservation of cetaceans and whale sharks. He has also performed training on whale and dolphin watching rules in the world.



## DAY 1

### EMBARKATION

Mahé is the largest granite island of Seychelles, covering about 150 sq km, home to 85% of the human population. This mountainous island, filled with tropical vegetation, has an exceptional natural environment and well-preserved tropical flora.

Morning embarkation from Port Victoria, Inter-Island Quay, followed by the Captain's welcome briefing. At noon we will depart Mahé and start sailing north to Denis Island. On our way, we will take a break from sailing for a refreshing sunset swim in the Indian Ocean. An evening anchorage near Denis Island.

In the evening, an introduction to Creole cuisine with a welcome barbecue dinner on board and an introductory lecture on whales we are expecting to encounter in the next four days.



# DAY 2-5

## Whales and Dolphins Ground off Denis Island

The islands in Seychelles are divided into two distinct geological types. The first is the granitic islands – like Mahé, Praslin, Curieuse, La Digue, and Aride, which we will visit later on during the cruise. These islands, 650 million years old, are ancient fragments of continental crust settled on the Mahé Plateau with water not deeper than 100m. They are generally more mountainous, humid and populated. In contrast, the second geological type is the coralline islands, some made of elevated coral reefs and some merely sand cays. One of these is Denis, next to which we are anchoring. Denis lies 95 km north of Mahé and is the northmost coralline island in Seychelles, near the drop-off of the Mahé Plateau, on which many species of marine mammals feed at depths of few hundred meters and in an area that can reach several thousand meters when sailing offshore.

### How does the Whale Watching Expedition work?

We are now at the feeding and breeding grounds for the cetacean species of Seychelles. In the upcoming days, our vessel Maya's Dugong will sail around and look for whales and dolphins. Once we spot them, we will approach and observe them carefully from the main boat, while trying to get as much data on their biology and as many pictures of them as possible. When conditions permit, we will disembark into small boats and try to approach them in a careful and respectful manner, and even snorkel next to them, getting the privilege to watch them underwater.

Scientific activities will also take place – we will conduct monitoring of the marine mammals, including photographing and individually identifying them. We will drop special hydrophones underwater to learn what sounds they produce and to listen to them. Recording of the sounds will be performed. We might also perform a skin biopsy to identify their gender and their genetic profile, and as to discover more about their diet and possible contamination with pollutants. We will try to equip them with satellite tags to better know their movements.

On the evenings we will listen to lectures on the biology of marine mammals and how to recognize and study whales and dolphins. We will have workshops following the photos and videos which were taken during the expedition, exercise photo identification and create catalogues for photo ID. After recording their sounds, we will learn how to recognize each species.

Your safety and comfort are our highest priority. The schedule is dependent on weather conditions. In the event of adverse conditions, all itineraries are subject to change at the discretion of the captain and the expedition leader.





## What whales and dolphins will we look for?

This area is filled with dolphins and whales. Orcas, Blue whales and the elusive Longman's beaked whale are the cherry on the cake, we hope to observe. Based on previous observations in the area, these are the species we are looking for:

### Large whales

**Humpback Whale:** *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Large toothed whales

**Sperm whale** *Physeter macrocephalus*

Large baleen whales

**Bryde's whale** *Balaenoptera brydei*

**Blue whale** *Balaenoptera musculus*

**Minke whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

### 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 macrorhynchus*

**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 Seychelles 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*

Small cetaceans in the Seychelles Plateau: shallow waters

Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops aduncus*

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.

# DAY 6

## Aride

After anchorage, disembark at first light at Aride, a secluded nature reserve where scientific research is taking place, so few visit this magical island. With the guidance of a local ranger, we will enter the forest to discover a variety of seabirds and five endemic land birds, including the Seychelles Warbler, with about 2000 individuals remaining. Here, as in the Galapagos Islands, birds are not afraid of humans, giving a unique opportunity to closely watch them nesting amongst the tree branches or in burrows inside tree trunks, feeding their chicks. Amongst many others, the elegant White-tailed Tropicbirds are particularly photogenic.

The trail takes us to the summit of the nature trail, where dramatic cliffs tower above the Indian Ocean in a spectacular view. Hundreds of birds soar above the cliffs and roost in the trees. The most impressive one is the frigatebird – here in Aride it is the

largest frigatebird roost outside of Aldabra. This impressive seabird has an impressive wingspan of two meters while weighing only 1.5 kg – a unique combination that allows it to perform aerobatic stunts, and chase other birds until they regurgitate recently captured food, which the frigatebird snatches in midair – a spectacle that will take place right before our eyes! Aride is also the only natural location in the world for the endangered Wright's gardenia (*Rothmannia annae*), a tree with beautiful white and very fragrant flowers.

After returning ashore, we'll enjoy a BBQ lunch on the beach, before heading to an afternoon snorkeling or diving around Aride. The island's coral reef boasts 400 species of fish. We'll enjoy the sunset before anchorage for the night. In the evening after dinner a lecture session.



# DAY 7

## Praslin

While enjoying an early breakfast, the vessel will head to Praslin Island, Seychelles' second largest inhabited island and a popular destination for nature lovers. The island was discovered by the French explorer Lazare Picault in 1744, who named it 'Isle des Palmes' in reference to its luxuriant vegetation.

After breakfast, we disembark for a visit to the famous World Heritage Site, the Vallee De Mai. This ancient forest is home to the famous and rare Coco de Mer, which boasts the largest seed in the plant kingdom, weighing 15 kg. This palm gained popularity thanks to its curiously shaped double coconut, reminiscent of the shape of the human pelvis. Walking in the lush nature reserve creates an atmosphere of a mysterious and magical forest, thanks to the canopy above created by 30m high trees, with leaves up to 8m long. Here you might meet the endangered Seychelles parrot, endemic to Seychelles and the

only parrot in this island nation, which its entire population numbers only a few hundred individuals.

Praslin is also renowned for its magnificent white fine sandy beaches. We will rest on the shore of Baie Ste Anne in east Praslin, and can visit a local market. After the visit, we will head back to the vessel for a late lunch.

Afternoon at Anse Lazio, frequently voted as one of the world's most beautiful beaches. Dive, snorkel or swim along this magnificent bay in the north of Praslin, while enjoying the granite rock formation surrounding us and a variety of fishes and marine creatures. In the evening after dinner, a lecture session.



# DAY 8

## Curieuse

At first light, we will anchor next to Curieuse Island, which is uninhabited apart from the rangers taking care of the natural park. Our tour begins with meeting Aldabra giant tortoises *Aldabrachelys gigantea* roaming freely on the beaches and amongst the trees. This species is one of the largest tortoises in the world, weighing up to 250 kg, and living up to 100-200 years and even more. We will also take a look at a shelter for young tortoises, allowing them to grow up safely before returning to nature when they reach adulthood.

We'll head into the island's extensive mangrove forest, unique salt-tolerant trees, which are adapted to live in saltwater. The flooded area surrounding the forest is home to a variety of marine life including various species of crabs, notably the famous Giant mangrove crab *Cardisoma carnifex* with arms reaching up to 30 cm long. During the walk we will reach a beautiful viewpoint over the area. At the end of the route, we will discover the beach of Curieuse, with intriguing rock formations creating passages and labyrinth formations and a variety of swaying coconut palms leaning towards the sea. Enjoy the beach before heading back to the boat for lunch.

After lunch, we take the opportunity to snorkel or dive at little uninhabited St. Pierre Island, a picturesque rocky island. The granite rock that towers out of the turquoise sea, with its small palm crown, epitomizes Seychelles perfectly. In the evening after dinner, a lecture.



# DAY 9

## La Digue

After an early breakfast, we'll disembark at first light in La Digue. The local community on the island is the third in size in Seychelles. We'll take a bus to Anse Source d'Argent, regarded as one of the world's most beautiful beaches, with its unique granite rock formations, small bays and coves, palm trees, white sand and lagoon offering an opportunity for exceptional photography.

From the beach, we will head towards Union Estate, a park where we can see the processes of the coconut's copra production, vanilla plantations and old colonial houses. We'll then head towards a high viewpoint, with a panoramic view over the Seychelles granitic islands. We'll proceed to the island nature reserve called the Veuve Reserve, where it may be possible to see the beautiful Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher.

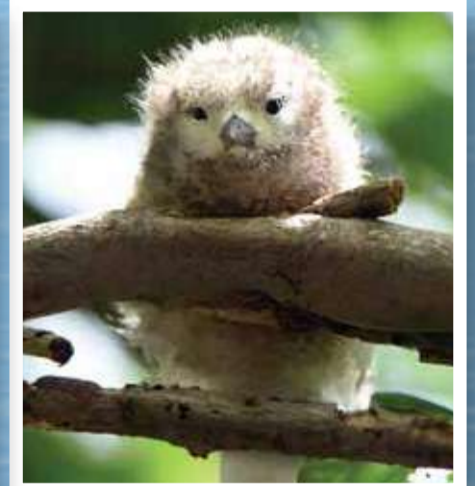
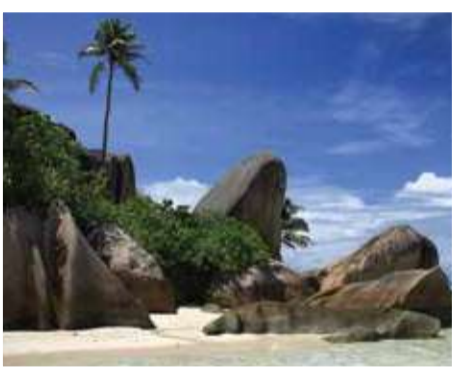
Afternoon sail to Ave Maria rocks to snorkel, dive and get an opportunity to take pictures of this unique little granite island. In the evening after dinner, a final lecture session.

While sailing around the inner islands, we may have the chance to observe some schools of the friendly Indo-Pacific dolphin which look very similar to the well-known TV program Flipper.



## DAY 10 - DISEMBARKATION

Early morning sail to the Inter-Island Quay. Disembarkation at the Inter-Island Quay at 08.30hrs.



## USEFUL INFORMATION & TRAVEL TIPS

Your safety and comfort are our highest priority. In the event of adverse conditions, all itineraries are subject to change at the captain's discretion.

- Be sure to bring plenty of sun-screen, a cap or hat and sunglasses - Seychelles is generally warm and sunny throughout the year and the sun's rays can be especially impactful onboard the vessel, due to the reflection from the sea, also consider bringing a second skin to protect yourself from the sun while paddling
- Seychelles may sometimes be windy and rainy (still warm), it is advisable to bring a very light coat for that purpose
- Bring suitable footwear for walking on deck and on the beach, as well as in shallow water (some island visits require embarking & disembarking from dinghies in shallow water).
- On some island visits, there might be some mosquitos, we recommend bringing mosquito repellent.
- There are numerous opportunities to dive on most days of the itinerary, and we can also conduct introductory dives for novices. Contact us for dive rates and equipment rental fees.
- All our cruises are full board - we serve a combination of international and authentic Creole cuisine. Please contact us for special dietary needs.
- Bottled water, soft drinks, beer, wine and spirits are available on board. Price list available on request.