

Bali to Komodo – In Search of the Dragon!

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Exclusive Charter: October 2026

Outline itinerary

14 Oct	Depart London.
15 Oct	Arrive Denpasar (Bali), overnight Sanur.
16 Oct	Fly Maumere, embark Mermaid II
17 - 24 Oct	Wildlife cruise around Bali and Komodo.
25 Oct	Disembark Bali; fly London.
26 Oct	Arrive London (or regional airport).

Post-tour extension

25/27 Oct	The Menjangan.
28 Oct	Transfer Sanur & depart.
29 Oct	Arrive UK

Dates

Wed 14th October – Thurs 26th October 2026
Post-tour extension to Sunday 29th October 2026

Cost

£7,495 (London/London); £6,795 (Bali/Bali)
Post-tour extension: from £1,295

Grading

A (easy) – please see tour grading section

Focus

Cetaceans, marine life, birds, other natural history & local culture



Images from top: Komodo Dragon, Fraser's Dolphin & Oriental Sweetlips (Courtesy of Shutterstock & Chas Anderson)



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Introduction

Bali and Komodo are just two of the 17,000 islands that make up the archipelago of Indonesia, the largest in the world. This is a country born of fire, a region shaped over the millennia by huge tectonic forces and the slow, but inexorable, collision of the Indo-Australian and Eurasian Plates. From the tropical paradise of Bali a great arc of volcanic islands stretches to the east including Lombok, Sumbawa, Komodo and Flores. Some of these are now quiet, the heat from beneath having subsided long ago, whilst others still retain their internal furnace and awaken from time to time. All, however, lie in warm tropical seas, home to the most diverse marine-life anywhere in the world with over 3,500 species of fish (more than enough to keep the keenest snorkeller enthralled!) and a wonderful array of tropical whales and dolphins. On the islands themselves, an equally fascinating variety of birds and other wildlife may be found, including their most infamous inhabitant of all, the formidable Komodo Dragon, the largest species of lizard left on Earth! The wildlife that lives on this archipelago is of particular interest to the naturalist as it is here that the Asian fauna gives way to the Australasian wildlife, the boundary being marked by the famous 'Wallace Line' between Bali and Lombok.



Indonesian butterfly fish (Chas Anderson)



Sea Squirts (Chas Anderson)

This exciting holiday will be led by marine biologist Dr. Chas Anderson, a leading authority on the cetaceans and fishes of the tropical Indian Ocean and pioneer of whale and dolphin-watching in the region. Chas will meet the group on arrival in Maumere. The group will also be accompanied by a Naturetrek naturalist tour leader who will travel with the group from the UK. Our home for the 9-night cruise will be 'MV Mermaid II', a comfortable liveaboard motor-yacht with en-suite and air-conditioned cabins to accommodate a maximum of 16 guests.

Itinerary

Please note that the following itinerary should be treated as a guide only, not an exact program. Flexibility is the key to all wildlife cruises and our exact route and programme will depend on weather conditions, wildlife encounters, the experience of the tour leader and the advice of the ship's captain and crew.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London Heathrow this evening on a scheduled overnight flight to Bali, usually via Kuala Lumpur or Singapore (regional flights are often available – please contact the Naturetrek office for further information).

Day 2

Bali

Following a change of aircraft, we are due to arrive on the palm-fringed island of Bali in the late afternoon, transferring from the airport to a beachfront hotel for our first night in the Indonesian archipelago. Bali is located at the westernmost end of the Lesser Sunda Islands, between Lombok and Java, and is just as exotic and beautiful as you would imagine! This evening will be a chance to relax and unwind after the long journey, or perhaps enjoy a first swim or snorkel in the warm sea.



Beach in Bali (Sara Frost)

Days 3 – 11

Bali – Komodo

This morning we return to the airport for the short flight to Maumere, and on arrival board 'MV Mermaid I'. We begin our journey west towards Komodo this afternoon. The exact itinerary for this cruise will be kept flexible to take account of such factors as the weather and wildlife sightings, benefiting from the unrivalled experience of Chas Anderson and his crew. As we travel from island to island we will stop to enjoy the scenery, cetaceans and other wildlife we meet along the way. Flying fish skitter away over the water's surface, whilst high overhead menacing flocks of Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds endlessly circle, occasionally joined by their rare Christmas Island cousin, while the beautiful Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbirds are also likely. We will travel by day and anchor early each evening in a sheltered spot to allow plenty of time for snorkelling and to appreciate the wonderful diversity of underwater life that abounds here, including, we hope, Manta Rays! Then, as darkness falls, far from the light pollution that blights so much of Western world, we can make our way out to the decks of 'MV Mermaid II' to enjoy stunning views of the night sky.



Spotted Dolphins (Chas Anderson)

One of the main focuses of this cruise will be the tropical cetaceans that live in these warm waters, especially those in and around Komodo National Park. Species that we are likely to encounter

include False Killer Whale and Melon-headed Whale, plus Spinner, Spotted, Risso's and Fraser's Dolphins. Other possible species include Blue Whale, Cuvier's Beaked Whale, Dwarf Sperm Whale, Rough-toothed Dolphin and we will be keeping a sharp look out for the little-known Eden's Whale, a pending split from Bryde's Whale.



Melon-headed Whales (Sara Frost)

After around three days of cruising, we will reach Komodo and Rinca, the two rugged islands that are the infamous home of the fearsome Komodo Dragon, the largest species of lizard in the world, which can grow to over 3 metres in length! We plan to spend a full three days within the Komodo National Park, and aim to make a landing on both Komodo and Rinca. As well as the extremely impressive Komodo Dragons, we will spend time on land looking for some of the region's land birds including Green Junglefowl, Variable Goshawk, Wallacean Drongo, Flame-breasted Sunbird and the endangered Yellow-crested Cockatoo. In addition, at one site just south of Komodo we have a real chance of snorkelling with Manta Rays and will make a special effort to do this during our stay!



Coral and marine life (Sara Frost) and Manta Ray (Chas Anderson)

For our final three days on board MV Mermaid will continue cruising west, with plenty more time for cetacean watching and snorkelling. After a thorough exploration we are due to arrive back into the port at Denpasar, Bali, late on Day 11.

Day 12

Fly London

After breakfast this morning we will sadly have to disembark MV Mermaid, ahead of our international flight onto London. Your holiday does not have to end here, however, for Bali is the perfect place for a few days of post-cruise relaxation and reflection before beginning the long journey home!

Day 13

Arrive London

We are due to arrive into London this morning, again following a change of plane en route.

Post-tour Extension to Bali Barat National Park

Day 12

Transfer Bali Barat National Park

After arriving back into Bali, we will be met for the transfer to The Menjangan, within Bali Barat (West Bali) National Park for the next three nights. The journey is likely to take around 4 to 5 hours. The rest of the afternoon will be at leisure.

Days 13 – 14

Bali Barat National Park

The Menjangan is a peaceful nature retreat, located in the heart of the unspoiled Bali Barat National Park on the island's stunning north-west coast. Built in several sections spread out over a wide area, the main accommodation is the 'Monsoon Lodge' which houses delightful en suite rooms, and is near one of the two restaurants. The other restaurant, and the remaining rooms (available for a



Coppersmith Barbet

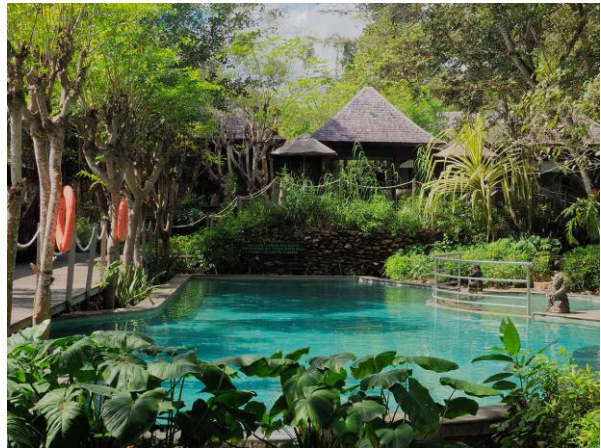
supplement) are around 10-15 minutes by bike, or just a few minutes by vehicle, away on the coast. We will stay in the Monsoon Lodge and enjoy our meals at the Pantai Restaurant on the beach. Here there is also a dive school, spa and jetty, with easy snorkelling off the jetty. Bicycles are freely available to use to travel between the lodge and the coast, and converted minivans which transport guests around the site can be called at any time.

We have two full days to relax and enjoy Bali Barat National Park. The whole area is covered with dry, scrubby woodland criss-crossed by several easy to follow paths, allowing guests to wander and enjoy the birdlife at their leisure. Collared Kingfisher, Blue-tailed and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Sunda Pygmy-woodpecker, Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet-headed Flowerpecker and Ornate Sunbird are all possible walking the extensive grounds. On the coast, terns, egrets and herons are abundant. Optional morning and afternoon bird walks led by the on-site naturalist will provide the opportunity to search for many of the park's more elusive birds, including Green Junglefowl, Javan Hanging Parrot, Javan Banded Pitta, Lineated and Coppersmith Barbets, Black-winged Myna and,



Bali Starling

of course, the beautiful Bali Starling. By the early 1990s the wild population of Bali Starling had diminished to only around 30 birds, and extreme pressure from poachers meant that 10 years later there were only 2 – 3 breeding pairs left in the national park. Following a captive breeding and release programme, the numbers have increased, and wild-born starlings are once again breeding within the park. Our bird walks will start at around 6am each day, returning for breakfast at around 8.30am. During the heat of the day you are free to relax, enjoy the hotel's facilities, snorkel along the coast or enjoy further birding around the resort. Then, when the air has cooled a little, we will meet again at around 3.30pm for a further bird walk prior to sunset drinks and dinner overlooking the beach.



Monsoon Deluxe Room and The Menjangan's Pool

Day 15

Transfer Denpasar & Depart

Depending on flight times, we may have time for a final bird walk this before breakfast. Then, we must transfer back to Bali's Denpasar airport in time to check-in for our international flights home.

Day 16

Arrive London

We are due to arrive back into London early this morning.

Extension Price

The price for the 3-night post-tour extension on a half board basis (breakfast and dinner; lunch is excluded) is subject to the number of participants and a minimum group size:

6 – 9 participants: **£1,495** per person

10 – 13 participants: **£1,295** per person

Single occupancy is available for the extension for an additional £375.

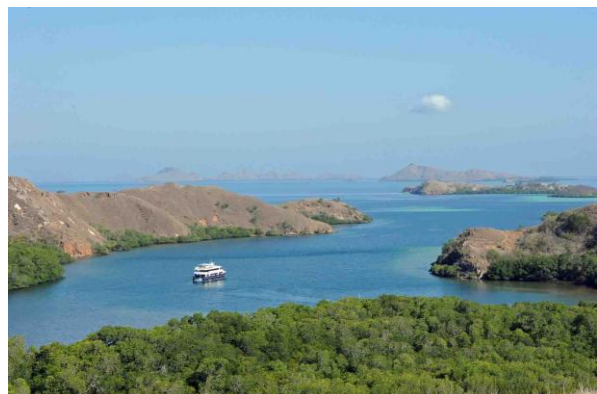
Tour focus

The holiday will focus on the region's cetaceans, Manta Rays, Komodo Dragons, birds and the other marine wildlife likely to be encountered here at this time of year. There will also be plenty of opportunities to enjoy the underwater life for those who wish to snorkel.

Tour grading

We have graded this holiday A (easy). There will be an opportunity for easy, optional walks in the daytime. On Komodo and Rinca in particular we occasionally choose to split the group to allow some to walk further and at a faster pace with others taking their time. Getting on and off the MV Mermaid II is usually easy although, if the sea is choppy, there will always be a friendly hand from the crew or Naturetrek staff should you require any assistance. Snorkelling and swimming activities are optional, but highly recommended!

NB - Although we have graded this holiday as 'easy', please be aware that the MV Mermaid II is a small cruise vessel, not a luxury cruise ship. The different decks are accessed by short - but quite steep - staircases and the vessel can roll somewhat if the conditions are a little choppy. As such an average level of fitness is required to get the most out of this holiday and please could we ask you to ensure that you are fit enough to undertake this cruise. Should you have any further questions on this aspect of the tour please give the Naturetrek office a call.



Komodo Dragon (Sara Frost) and MV Mermaid off Rinca (Chas Anderson)

Extra expenses

The following expenses are included in the tour cost:

- International flights (unless booking on a 'land only basis')
- All accommodation including the overnight on Bali at the start of the holiday
- All meals during the cruise on board MV Mermaid II, and breakfast on Bali
- Teas, coffee and water on board MV Mermaid II

The following expenses are not included and should be budgeted for:

- Komodo National Park fees – currently set at €250 per person though subject to change. These must be paid on board MV Mermaid II

- Crew tips
- Optional Whale Shark excursion (currently US\$30 pp, subject to local conditions)
- Any meals required other than breakfast on Bali (allow around £40)
- Drinks other than those mentioned above
- Visa fee (currently purchased on arrival in Indonesia)
- All items of a personal nature, such as souvenirs

NB - Naturetrek reserves the right to impose a surcharge on this cruise should fuel prices increase significantly, or currency exchange rates fluctuate greatly, and as such the boat operators request an additional payment. We always do our very best to avoid such increases in costs and only impose a surcharge in rare, exceptional circumstances, and only as permitted by our booking conditions.

Daily itinerary

Our itinerary while on board will be very flexible, to make the most of cetacean sightings. The outline given above should therefore be considered to be a guideline only, not a rigidly structured programme! We will journey past far-flung islands, enjoying the scenery, and taking our time to watch dolphins, whales, flying fish and seabirds. We will travel by day and anchor early most evenings in a sheltered spot. Depending on our location there should be opportunities for a snorkel or island visit at these times, using the Mermaid II's two inflatable tenders. And after dark, the top deck offers stunning views of the night sky. It is likely we will have to make several night passages during the course of this cruise, especially if delayed by too many sightings(!).

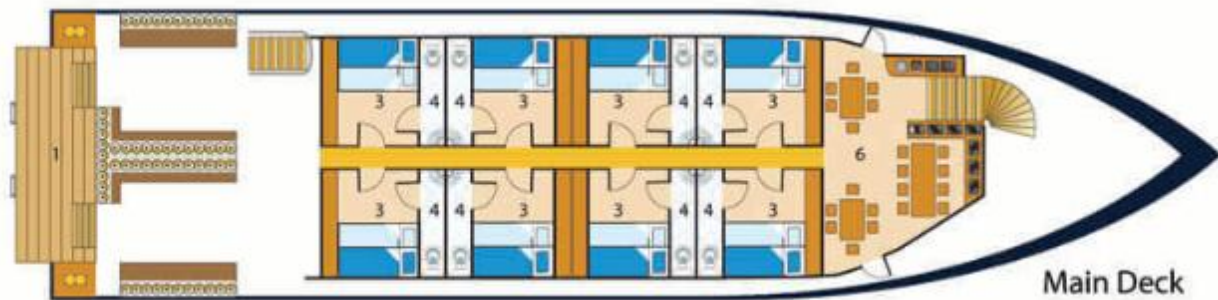
Weather

Indonesia spans the equator, so the climate is tropical. September is part of the inter-monsoon season, and is normally calm and sunny, but the wind can occasionally pick up and bring showers. Temperatures typically reach 29-33°C during the day, dropping to about 25-27°C at night. Sea breezes make this quite comfortable, although when there is no wind it does feel hot. While snorkelling, sea temperatures are pleasantly warm (typically 27-29°C). In a few places (e.g. off the south of Komodo) the sea can be cooler (24-27°C) as a result of upwelling – which is the source of nutrients that ultimately feed the local Mantas and cetaceans.

MV Mermaid II

For this tour we have exclusively chartered 32m liveaboard safari vessel, MV Mermaid II. She is not luxurious, but extremely comfortable and ideal for our needs. Mermaid II has a local crew of 9, including an experienced captain and a full-time cook. The dining room is located on the main deck where delicious buffet style Thai and western meals are served. The saloon is large and spacious with lounge suites and big windows, bar fridge, tea and coffee facilities, library and a full selection of marine life books. There are 8 guest cabins on the main deck, all of which are en-suite and air-conditioned with large windows. Each has a lower double bunk and single upper bunk, and can therefore be used for double or twin occupancy.

Cabin layout (main deck):



Indonesian Wildlife

Cetaceans

The main attraction of whale and dolphin watching in Indonesia is the wonderful diversity of tropical cetaceans. Recent research has in particular highlighted the abundance of species in and around the Komodo National Park. Of course, nothing can be guaranteed with wild animals, but it would be very surprising if we did not see a good selection of whales and dolphins. One species that we will be looking out for especially is Eden's Whale. This little-known baleen whale is a pending split from Bryde's Whale, occurs in inshore waters around the northern Indian and western Pacific Oceans, and has been positively recorded several times from the south of Komodo. Cetaceans that we are quite likely to see include:

Eden's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
False Killer Whale	<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>
Melon-headed Whale	<i>Peponocephala electra</i>
Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>
Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>
Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
Indo-pacific Bottlenose	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>
Fraser's Dolphin	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>

We also hope to see some of the following:

Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera brydei</i>
Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>
Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>
Pygmy Killer Whale	<i>Feresa attenuata</i>
Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>

Humpback Dolphin	<i>Sousa chinensis</i>
Rough-toothed Dolphin	<i>Steno bredanensis</i>

Other Wildlife

While out with the whales and dolphins there will be plenty of opportunities for seabird watching. Many tropical species have been recorded from the region. Possibilities include Boobies (Brown, Red-footed and Masked), Frigatebirds (Lesser, Great and possibly also Christmas Island), Tropicbirds (White-tailed and Red-tailed), Shearwaters (Wedge-tailed and Streaked), Storm-petrels (Swinhoe's and Matsudaira's) as well as dainty Red-necked Phalaropes.

As for land birds, Indonesia has the highest diversity in the entire old world, and the Lesser Sunda islands alone are home to some 45 endemic species. We will not have time to search them all out, but we will have some island visits, and can expect to see a number of local specialties. These should include the Yellow-crested Cockatoo, once widely distributed but now endangered and seen regularly only within the Komodo National Park. A further terrestrial attraction should be the tens of thousands of fruit bats that roost on the small island of Satonda off Sumbawa.

However, the main attraction on land will undoubtedly be the Komodo Dragon. This fearsome lizard can grow to over 3m (10') in length. It is confined to Komodo and Rinca Islands (and some small surrounding areas) and we hope to go ashore on both.

Other Marine Life

While underway, in addition to whales and dolphins, we will undoubtedly see plenty of other marine life. Both flying fish and tuna are abundant and should be spotted regularly. If we are lucky we may see Turtles, Sunfish and possibly also a Whale Shark. But a real highlight should be snorkeling on the magnificent coral reefs, which are alive with myriad colourful reef fishes. And at one site on the south side of Komodo we have a real chance of snorkeling with Manta Rays. There will be time in the evenings for discussion and identification of the bewildering variety of reef animals.



Komodo National Park (left) and Komodo Dragons (right)

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Indonesia. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/indonesia> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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