

Undiscovered Indonesia – Sulawesi to Raja Ampat

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Exclusive Charter: February/March 2027

Outline itinerary

Days 1/2	Depart London / in flight
Day 3	Arrive Sulawesi and overnight.
Day 4	At leisure or Tangkoko NP
Day 5	Board 'MV Mermaid I' and begin cruise.
Day 6/15	Cruising from Sulawesi to Raja Ampat.
Day 16	Disembark 'MV Mermaid' and fly London
Day 17	Arrive London

Dates

Tuesday 24th February – Thursday 12th March 2027

Cost

From £10,995 (London/London); £9,495 (Manado/Sorong)

Main deck cabin (with window) - Extra £345 per person

Master suite – Extra £495 per person

Grading

A (easy).

Focus

Cetaceans, Reef Manta Rays and other marine-life, snorkelling, birds and general natural history.



From top: Pantropical Spotted Dolphins Raja Ampat island & Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise. Images courtesy of Shutterstock & Alison Steel



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Introduction

Indonesia is a country of superlatives. It is the largest archipelago in the world, stretching around an eighth of the world's circumference, comprising over 17,000 islands, with a stunning variety of cultures and the most diverse marine-life anywhere in the world. Following the success of our incredible wildlife cruise from Bali to Komodo, we are delighted to offer another cruise on board MV Mermaid I around some of the lesser-known parts of Indonesia, starting in Sulawesi and



finishing at the stunning islands of Raja Ampat in the far east of Indonesia. For this 11-night /12-day cruise on board our exclusively chartered liveaboard vessel, we travel east from Bitung (in north Sulawesi), along the west coast of Halmahera, by the Kofiau Islands and finally around the islands of the Raja Ampat archipelago. The coral reefs here are the richest in the world, and we will aim to snorkel each day. We will also go ashore in search of some

fabulous local birdlife, including the Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise. Out at sea we will be looking for the wealth of dolphins and whales that call this area home, including Bryde's and Omura's Whales, as well as a superb diversity of smaller species.

Itinerary

Please note that the following itinerary should be treated as a guide only, not an exact programme. 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 begin with a flight to Manado on the eastern end of the island of Sulawesi. Flight schedules are usually confirmed around 11 months prior to departure at which point we will select the best available route. There are currently no direct flights from the UK to Manado, so we anticipate flying via Jakarta or Singapore. Regional flights from elsewhere in the UK may well be available, so please advise us in the Naturetrek office if this is likely to be of interest.

Day 2

In flight.

Day 3

Arrive Manado, transfer Lembah

We will arrive in Manado this morning and transfer to a convenient hotel near Bitung for the rest of the day and a two-night stay, giving us a chance to recover a little from the long flight.

Day 4

Lembeh

There will be an opportunity today to get in the water for some snorkelling or there will be an option to visit the nearby Tangkoko reserve, where black Crested Macques and Tarsiers can be seen, as well as a variety of forest birds, such as Sulawesi Lilac Kingfisher, Knobbed Hornbill, Minahasa Masked Owl and Green Imperial Pigeon. Alternatively, it will be a day at leisure for those who would like time to relax.

Days 5 – 15

Cruise on board MV Mermaid I

We will board MV Mermaid I during the mid-morning at Bitung, setting sail around lunchtime, and will spend today and the next ten full days exploring the coral-rich waters of these tropical islands. We will meander through the archipelago, initially heading east then south, and take our time to enjoy the dolphins, whales, flying fish, seabirds and, of course, the breathtaking scenery. During our lazy days at sea, the region's cetaceans will be our main focus, and we are likely to see several species of whale and dolphin during our cruise.



Whilst nothing is certain in the world of whale-watching, possibilities include Spinner, Spotted and Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins, Short-finned Pilot Whale, Sperm Whale and both False Killer and Killer Whales, as well as rarer, little-known species such as Bryde's and Omura's Whales. We will make time for snorkelling each day; over 3,500 species of fish have been recorded in Indonesia — enough to keep even the most avid snorkellers enthralled! There will certainly be plenty of time to explore the underwater world, with snorkelling opportunities available most mornings and late afternoons once we drop anchor. We will keep our itinerary very flexible, to make the most of cetacean sightings, travelling by day and anchoring early most evenings in a sheltered spot.

To start off with we will head out of the Lembeh Strait, then head across the Molucca Sea towards the west coast of Halmahera. This wide, deep channel is used by migrating whales, so we will keep an eye out for whales and dolphins during the crossing. Pulau Tifore lies roughly half way across, so we will break the journey with some snorkelling here. The reefs are known for their schools of fish and, in particular, barracuda are often found here.



Omura's Whale (Alison Steel)

Arriving in the south of Halmahera, the reefs are rich with marine life, and there will be plenty of time for exploring these. The channels between the islands are also excellent places for cetacean watching. From here, we'll cross to Pisang Island (or Pulau Pisang), which is a remote island with thriving coral reefs and plentiful fish. The crossing should result in further cetacean sightings, as well as various seabirds. Boo and Kofiau Islands are the outliers of the Raja Ampat archipelago. This incredible archipelago consists of more than 1,500 precipitous, jungle-clad islands, with white sand beaches and secret lagoons, all surrounded by luminous turquoise waters. Boo and Kofiau are rarely visited, but have some of the best reefs around their shorelines. Kofiau is also home to a couple of endemic birds, the Kofiau Monarch and Kofiau Paradise Kingfisher, which we will aim to look for if possible (please note that this will be at the discretion of the boat crew and the local residents, whom we will be seeking permission from).



From Kofiau, we will then travel slowly through the islands of Raja Ampat, keeping an eye out for cetaceans, seabirds and flying fish. The islands have some spectacular karst scenery, and we will aim to go ashore at least once, perhaps being able to visit Sawanderek for a village tour and some birding. Many of the islands remain cloaked in forest and are home to a wealth of fantastic birdlife, so we will also enjoy some island visits and, in particular, make a special effort to see both Wilson's and Red Bird-of-Paradise, although the Red can be trickier to track down.

At the end of each day we will relax, reflect on our sightings and discuss the bewildering diversity of reef animals with our expert tour leader and marine biologist, Dr Chas Anderson. After sunset on the first evening, we will have an orientation talk from Chas and, most evenings, he will offer a talk or slide show for us to enjoy. Then after dark, far from the city lights, we will enjoy stunning views of the night sky before retiring to bed.

Day 16

Fly London

We plan to arrive at Sorong in the late afternoon or evening of Day 15, spending our final evening and night on board MV Mermaid I. After breakfast on Day 16 we will sadly have to disembark and transfer to the airport for our flights home.

Day 17

Arrive London

We are due to arrive in London this morning.

Images courtesy of Shutterstock, Alison Steel & Chas Anderson

Indonesian Wildlife

Cetaceans

The main attraction of whale and dolphin watching in Indonesia is the wonderful diversity of tropical cetaceans. 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 particular species that we will be looking out for is Omura's Whale. This little-known baleen whale was only described as a new species in 2003, and has been positively recorded several times from Raja Ampat. Cetaceans that we are quite likely to see include:

Omura's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera omurai</i>
Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera brydei</i>
Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>
Pantropical Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>
Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>
Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>
False Killer Whale	<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>

We also hope to see some of the following:

Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>
Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>
Pygmy Killer Whale	<i>Feresa attenuata</i>
Fraser's Dolphin	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>
Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>
Humpback Dolphin	<i>Sousa sahalensis</i>
Rough-toothed Dolphin	<i>Steno bredanensis</i>
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>

Birdlife

While out with the whales and dolphins there will be plenty of opportunities for seabird watching. As for land birds, Indonesia has the highest diversity in the entire old world, with West Papua and Raja Ampat being home to numerous 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. We will make at least one dedicated excursion ashore to look for the Birds-of-paradise.

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. We could see turtles and, if we are very lucky, possibly also a Whale Shark or a Dugong. But a real highlight should be snorkelling on the magnificent coral reefs, which are alive with myriad colourful reef fishes. There

will be time in the evenings for discussion and identification of the bewildering variety of reef animals.

Tour grading

We have graded this holiday A (easy). There will be an opportunity for easy, optional walks in the daytime, although the excursion for birds-of-paradise should be considered moderately difficult, with the track likely to be muddy and steep in places. Getting on and off the MV Mermaid I 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! For the snorkelling we use small dinghies and access back into these is via a short ladder.

NB - Although we have graded this holiday as 'easy', please be aware that the MV Mermaid I 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.

Focus

The holiday will focus on the region's cetaceans, fish, Reef Manta Rays, birds (including birds-of-paradise) 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.

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 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. If delayed by too many sightings(!) we may choose to make up some time by cruising at night.

Weather

Indonesia spans the equator, so the climate is tropical. March is the inter-monsoon season, and is normally calm and sunny, but the wind can 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 snorkeling, sea temperatures are pleasantly warm (typically 27-29°C).

MV Mermaid I

For this tour we have exclusively chartered the 28m liveaboard safari vessel, **MV Mermaid I**. She is not luxurious, but very comfortable and ideal for our needs. Mermaid has a local crew of 9, including an experienced captain and a full-time cook.

There are 7 guest cabins (all en-suite and air-conditioned), including:

Lower Deck – two lower deck cabins without windows, each with a double lower bunk and single upper bunk.

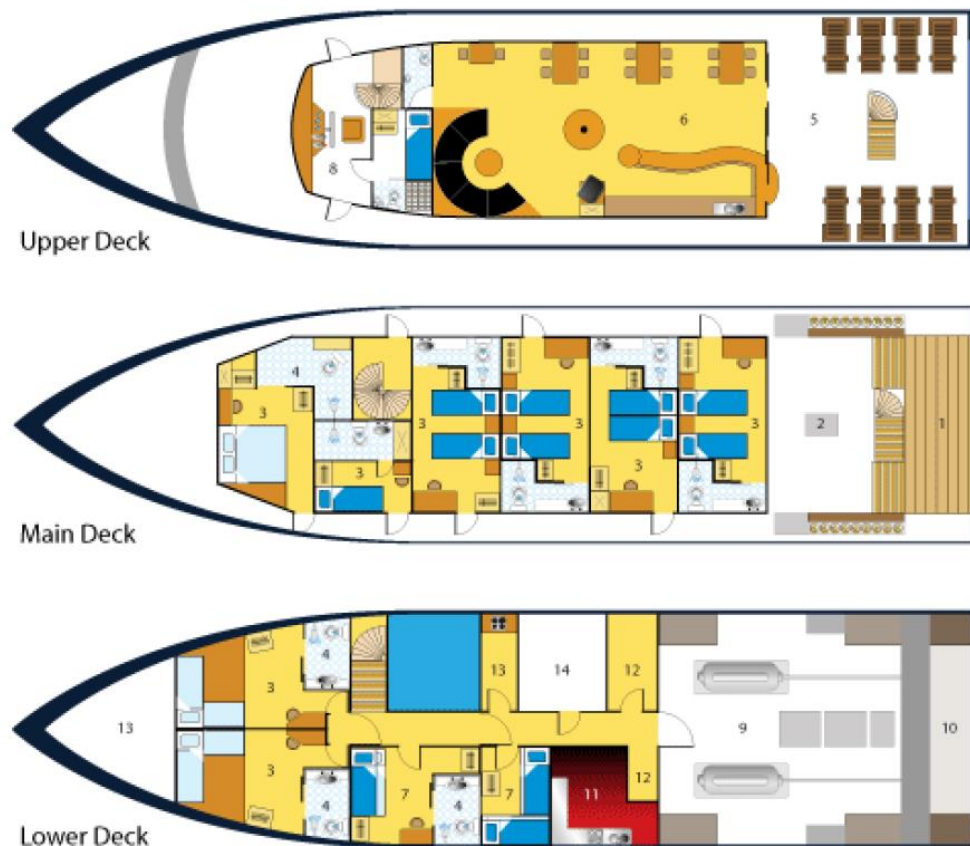
Main Deck – four standard cabins, each with windows and either one double bed or twin single beds, for an extra £345 per person.

Master Suite – one suite with one double bed and panoramic windows looking forward over the bows, for an extra £495 per person.



MV Mermaid I

Deck Plan:



Tour Leader

This trip will be led by Dr. Charles 'Chas' Anderson, a professional marine biologist who lives and works in the Maldives. He is an authority on both the cetaceans and fishes of the tropical Indian Ocean, and the pioneer of whale and dolphin watching in the region. Chas has made numerous visits to Indonesia over the past 25 years (including a spell working as a diving instructor on Flores), has dived widely throughout the archipelago, and leads Naturetrek whale- and dolphin-watching cruises between Bali and Komodo, as well as in Raja Ampat. He is the author of 'An Underwater Guide to Indonesia', and a major contributor to the best-selling divers' guide 'Underwater Indonesia'.

Extra Expenses

Whilst all meals are included during your cruise on board the MV Mermaid I, accommodation in Lembah is on a bed and breakfast basis only. We would recommend that you allow around £70 for lunches and dinner here. Drinks other than teas and coffees on board MV Mermaid I are excluded throughout the tour, as are guide tips, laundry, any locally paid airport taxes, visa fees and all items of a personal nature.

National Park and port fees are NOT included in the tour cost, and must be paid locally on board MV Mermaid I. These fees are currently set at €275, but are subject to change without notice.

NB - Naturetrek reserves the right to impose a surcharge on this cruise should fuel prices increase significantly, or currency exchange rates fluctuate enough to cause the boat operators to request an additional payment. As always, however, we will do our very best to avoid such increases in costs.

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 up to the point of 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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