Seychelles and Aldabra: A Wildlife Cruise

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

| Days 1/2 | Depart UK / Arrive Mahé & embark |
| Day 3 | At sea, late arrival at Bijoutier. |
| Day 4 | Island visit and snorkelling at Bijoutier |
| Day 5/6 | At sea; late arrival at Cosmoledo |
| Day 7 | Island visit and snorkelling at Cosmoledo |
| Day 8 | Early morning cruise to Astove, island visit and snorkelling. Overnight crossing to Aldabra |
| Day 9/11 | Island visit and snorkelling at Aldabra |
| Day 12 | Departure towards Amirantes |
| Day 13/14 | At sea |
| Day 15 | Arrival at St Joseph |
| Day 16 | Morning snorkel and island visit. Afternoon departure to Mahé |
| Day 17 | Arrive Mahé and overnight |
| Day 18 | Fly UK |

Dates
Sun 21st February – Wed 10th March 2021

Cost
£14,995 per person, based on sharing a double/twin berth cabin.
Introduction

For this very special, one off Naturetrek cruise, we have exclusively chartered MV Maya’s Dugong in late February 2021, to embark on an exciting voyage across the Indian Ocean. We will journey from the Seychelles’ largest island of Mahé, to the remote coral atoll of Aldabra, which lies over 1000km to the south-west. During our sea voyage between Mahé and Aldabra we will have plenty of time to relax on board, whilst passing through rich tropical waters and taking advantage of the opportunity to scan for whales, dolphins, seabirds and other marine-life. One of our stops on the way is likely to be the isolated atoll of Cosmoledo, a regular haunt of the stunning Red-tailed Tropicbird and enigmatic Crab Plover, and home to three breeding species of boobies (Masked, Red-footed and Brown).

The remote Aldabra Atoll itself is one of the largest coral atolls in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its remoteness and inaccessibility has allowed wildlife to flourish without interference from humans for much of its existence ... and flourish it has! The four main islands are home to over 100,000 Aldabra Giant Tortoises and the surrounding seas host important populations of Green and Hawksbill Turtles. The one remaining flightless bird of the Indian Ocean, the Aldabra Rail, lives here, and the coral reefs are simply outstanding. A real highlight of the holiday should be a drift snorkel through the large reef channel, with the tide gently carrying us past turtles, reef sharks and large groupers.

Our return voyage will see us enjoy further cetacean watching and a stop at St Joseph, before we arrive back into Mahé. From here, you are very welcome to extend your holiday with time on Mahé itself, nearby Praslin, or perhaps even the famous Bird Island, just a half hour flight to the north.

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

We depart in the afternoon on an Emirates flight to Mahé via Dubai. Flight schedules are usually confirmed around 11 months prior to departure, and currently flights are available from London Gatwick, Heathrow, Stansted, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow. British Airways also offer direct flights to Mahé, but these do not depart on a daily basis so some extra time either side of the cruise may be required to accommodate this schedule.
Day 2  
**Arrive Mahé, embark MV Maya’s Dugong**

We are due to arrive into Mahé early this morning. We will relocate to a convenient hotel where we will have breakfast before we transfer to the port in the late morning. We will embark MV Maya’s Dugong and settle into our cabins, and after our safety briefing are due to depart for the crossing to Bijoutier at around 2pm.

Day 3  
**At sea; arrive Bijoutier**

Today, and during all subsequent days spent at sea, we will be on the lookout for the wonderful variety of cetaceans, turtles and seabirds that live in the rich Indian Ocean. We will hope to see several of the following: Pilot Whales, False Killer Whales, Melon-headed Whales, Spotted Dolphins, Striped Dolphins, Spinner Dolphins, Risso’s Dolphins and Fraser’s Dolphins. Overhead we should see passing noddies, boobies, frigatebirds, shearwaters, Sooty and Bridled Terns, and it will always be worth keeping an eye out for passing turtles. We expect to arrive into Bijoutier late this evening.

Day 4  
**Bijoutier**

Waking this morning, we will no doubt be itching for our first snorkel excursion and an island visit. Bijoutier is the French word for “jeweller”, and indeed this small island is a real gem, surrounded by clear, shallow waters and an excellent reef. It takes only around 15 minutes to walk the entire island, which serves as a haven for Red-footed Booby, Crab Plover and Great and Lesser Frigatebirds, as well as nesting turtles. Hawksbill Turtles nest here from September to March, so we may be in time to catch them, and Green Turtles nest here (though generally at night) from January to September. The surrounding reefs will be a kaleidoscope of colour, and we will enjoy a leisurely snorkel to marvel at the numerous angelfish, butterflyfish, damselfish, wrasse, groupers, emperors, triggerfish, parrotfish, puffers, snappers… and many, many more! We will have fun trying to identify everything and perhaps dabble with some underwater photography.

Day 5 – 6  
**At sea**

Leaving Bijoutier behind, we spend the next two days at sea, searching for cetaceans along the way, aiming to arrive in the late evening of Day 6 at Cosmoledo.
Day 7

**Cosmoledo**

Cosmoledo is a wonderfully isolated coral atoll, with expansive flat, sand dunes, mangroves, grassland and an impressive inner lagoon. It is a haven for boobies, and we expect to see three species: Masked, Red-footed and Brown, along with Black-naped Tern, Fairy Tern, Red-tailed Tropicbird and local subspecies of Madagascar White-eye and Souimanga Sunbird. Along the beach we may find Crab Plover, Great and Lesser Sandplover and Curlew Sandpiper, plus there are large populations of both Green and Hawksbill Turtles, and the abundant Spinner Dolphins are likely to appear around our boat. Beneath the surface of the lagoon are pristine coral reefs with incredible marine diversity, and we will be sure to enjoy further snorkelling today.

Day 8

**Astove**

We will start the engines early this morning for the cruise to Astove, another breathtakingly beautiful atoll where we will pause today for another island visit and snorkelling opportunity, before we continue on with an overnight crossing to Aldabra itself.

Day 9 – 11

**Aldabra**

We will awake this morning at Aldabra: one of the largest coral atolls in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its remoteness and inaccessibility has allowed wildlife to flourish without interference from humans for much of its existence and we now have three full days to enjoy it to the full. The island and lagoon scenery is stunning, with famous ‘champignon’ coral rock formations, and amongst it we will enjoy some incredible wildlife walks. 100,000 Aldabra Giant Tortoises live on the four main islands, along with the impressive Coconut (or Robber) Crabs – the world’s largest terrestrial arthropod. The last remaining flightless bird of the Indian Ocean, the Aldabra Rail, lives here, along with the endemic Aldabra Drongo and Aldabra Fody. Madagascar Sacred Ibis, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Coucal, Comoros Blue Pigeon and local subspecies of Madagascar White-eye and Souimanga Sunbird can also be found ... plus dense populations of Great Frigatebirds and Red-footed Boobies.

We will make the most of our full three days at Aldabra, planning our island excursions and snorkelling trips around the tides. The snorkelling here is simply superb, with huge numbers of Black-tip Reef Sharks, Lemon Sharks, Stingrays, large populations of Green and Hawksbill Turtles,
myriad colourful reef fish and many larger reef fish including Bumphead Parrotfish. We will enjoy exhilarating drift snorkels, with the tide carrying us effortlessly into the safety of the lagoon whilst we watch all of these large sea creatures in all their splendour.

As we cruise around the atoll, we will be on the lookout, as always, for whales and dolphins – particularly Spinner Dolphins which are common here. Dugongs were once thought to be regionally extinct in this area, but in very recent years there have been multiple sightings within the lagoon – though we would still be very lucky to see them during our visit.

**Day 12 – 14**  
**Crossing to St. Joseph**

We must tear ourselves away from Aldabra this morning to begin the long crossing toward the Amirante Islands and then onwards to Mahé. If our timings are still on track, then we will spend much of the first day at sea fairly close to Aldabra, taking the time to look for the whales and dolphins that frequent the waters around the Atoll. We then spend the next two days at sea, though still keeping our eyes peeled for whales, dolphins and passing sea birds along the way.

**Day 15**  
**St. Joseph**

We aim to arrive at St. Joseph today in the late morning or early afternoon. There will be time today for a leg stretch on the island, and an afternoon snorkel too.

**Day 16**  
**St. Joseph; crossing to Mahé**

We will enjoy a final morning snorkel and island visit at St. Joseph atoll this morning, soaking in the wonderful reef life for the last time. Then, this afternoon, we must embark on our final crossing, setting off on the overnight crossing for Mahé.

**Day 17**  
**Mahé**

We should arrive into Mahe in the mid-morning. From the port we will transfer to a comfortable hotel for the final night of our Seychellois adventure. There will be ample time to enjoy the Creole cuisine, relax on the beach or enjoy a gentle swim, or wander along the coast to enjoy a final spot of birding.

**Day 18**  
**Fly UK**

We depart early this morning on an Emirates flight back to the UK, via Dubai.
Inclusions / Exclusions

The tour price includes:

- All meals once on board MV Maya’s Dugong
- All landing fees, marine park fees, nature reserve fees, SIF (Aldabra) impact fee
- Snorkelling equipment if required on board MV Maya’s Dugong
- Overnight accommodation on Mahé on a bed & breakfast basis at the end of the cruise

It does not include:

- Drinks throughout
- Any lunches and dinners required on Mahé
- Discretionary crew tips

NB - Naturetrek reserves the right to impose a surcharge on this cruise should fuel prices or local fees and taxes increase significantly and as such the boat operators request an additional payment prior to departure. As always, however, we will do our very best to avoid such increases in costs.

Tour grading

We have graded this holiday A (easy). There will be opportunities for easy, optional walks in the daytime. Getting on and off the MV Maya’s Dugong 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!

Although we have graded this holiday as ‘easy’, please be aware that the MV Maya’s Dugong 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. Once we depart from Mahe, we will be a very long way from any medical facilities. Should you have any further questions on this aspect of the tour please give the Naturetrek office a call.

Travel insurance

We will be travelling to some very remote islands during this cruise. It’s therefore essential that you possess adequate travel insurance which includes provision for evacuation by air from the Seychelles Outer Islands and Seychelles in case of necessity or medical emergency. Insurance details will need to be provided to the boat operator prior to embarkation.

Focus

The holiday will focus on the region’s cetaceans, fish, birdlife and the other marine wildlife likely to be encountered on this exciting voyage across the Indian Ocean – and, of course, the very special wildlife on Aldabra itself. There will be plenty of opportunities to enjoy the underwater life for those who wish to snorkel.
**MV Maya’s Dugong**

For this tour we have exclusively chartered 43m liveaboard vessel, MV Maya’s Dugong. She is not luxurious – there is a very limited choice of vessel available for cruising to Aldabra – but does host 7 simply furnished, comfortable cabins which are en-suite and air-conditioned. There are (again, simply furnished) communal areas including an indoor saloon and seating areas on deck.

Guest cabins are a mixture of configuration (all twins, some with a double bed and separate single bed or bunk) and fall into two categories: cabins 1, 2 and 3 on the upper and main decks have portholes; cabins 4 – 7 on the lower deck do not. Cabins are allocated on a first come, first served basis; if you have a preference please ask for availability on booking.

**MV Maya’s Dugong deck plan:**
Cabin with porthole             Standard cabin without porthole

Saloon and dining room       Relaxing and dining area on the top deck

Cruise leader

This cruise will be led by Dr. Charles ‘Chas’ Anderson, a professional marine biologist who is a leading authority on both the cetaceans and fishes of the tropical Indian Ocean, and the pioneer of whale and dolphin watching in the region. A second Naturetrek naturalist tour leader will also accompany the group from the UK.

Extensions

If you would like to extend your stay in the Seychelles, either on Mahé or another of the islands, we would be very happy to help with your plans. Please just call the Naturetrek office for ideas.

Weather

Seychelles lies just south of the Equator, so the climate is tropical. February to March is the tail end of the NW monsoon season, and is normally calm and sunny, but the wind can pick up and bring showers. Temperatures typically reach 28-32°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 26-28°C).
Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to the Seychelles. 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/seychelles 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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