

Gentle Giants of the Sea

WHALE SHARK ODYSSEY



**Witness the awe of the ocean's largest fish
in stunning Seychelles**

an ocean  **Odysseys** expedition aboard the M.V. MAYA'S DUGONG
in collaboration with the Marine Conservation Society of Seychelles



Whale Shark Odyssey 2010

7 nights aboard the Maya's Dugong
Sept 4-11 / Sept 11-18 / Sept 18-24

Expedition Overview

A joint initiative between Silhouette Cruises' expedition travel brand Ocean Odysseys, and the whale shark monitoring programme of the Marine Conservation Society of Seychelles (MCSS), this 7-night liveaboard trip in Seychelles aims to combine the intense fun and excitement of swimming with whale sharks amidst the islands' beautiful scenery, together with the enriching experience of learning more about these massive creatures by participating in actual scientific monitoring work being carried out by the MCSS.

This programme hosts guests onboard the MV Maya's Dugong, a 40-metre expeditionary vessel that serves as an ideal platform for guests to be able to maximise their chances for whale shark encounters in a convenient, comfortable and cost-effective way. Using the vessel as a 'floating hotel' passengers benefit from its large air-conditioned cabins and public areas, excellent service and cuisine from a full crew complement, and the excitement of continual new surroundings in beautiful Seychelles throughout the programme. While snorkelling with whale sharks may be the main highlight of the programme, it is far from the only thing on offer. We'll also experience Seychelles' unique diving and snorkelling seascape, the charm of several different islands and authentic Seychellois hospitality, as well as the rewarding feeling of contributing toward a real scientific programme bearing results for this threatened species.



Above image & cover: Michel Vely

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DAY1

Embarkation from Mahé at the Inter Island Quay, Port Victoria at 10.30 am. After the captain's welcome briefing, the Maya's Dugong departs toward Ilot island at the northern tip of Mahé, for some diving near this beautiful rocky granite outcrop. The currents around this peninsula may also provide a sliver of opportunity for our first whale shark encounter. In the evening, enjoy a presentation from our onboard experts from the MCSS about whale sharks in Seychelles, followed by a BBQ dinner as the vessel anchors in the beautiful Beau Vallon Bay overnight.

DAY2

The Maya's Dugong continues cruising around Mahé's northwestern coast toward the Conception channel, a waterway in between Mahé and the islands of Conception and Therese that has over the years become known as a popular whale shark hotspot on account of its currents and plankton-rich waters. But first, we'll visit nearby Baie Ternay for a morning dive or snorkel in this amazing marine national park. While we're in the water, MCSS pilots will be overhead in its micro-lite, surveying the seascape for whale sharks. In the afternoon, the locations of any sightings will be relayed and we'll position ourselves to meet up with the MCSS vessel in search of the whale sharks that have been spotted. The vessel will moor overnight in the flat calm of Baie Ternay.

DAY3

A southerly course brings the Maya's Dugong further down the western coast of Mahé toward Anse a la Mouche, for some diving and snorkelling with the pastoral south of Mahé as our backdrop. With MCSS in the air spotting for whale sharks in the morning, the afternoon will again see us rendezvous with the MCSS vessel in search of any sightings. In the evening, we'll learn more about the work currently being done by the MCSS to monitor and conserve whale sharks.

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DAY 4

The vessel cruises back northward, to Shark Bank off the northwest coast of Mahé for a morning dive at this unique site, one of Seychelles' deepest on the inner island plateau. With the micro-lite's morning reconnaissance, we will hopefully have another excursion with MCSS for a whale shark encounter in the afternoon. Before dinner we'll enjoy a presentation on whale shark migration across the world, and say goodbye to the MCSS staff who will be disembarking back to Mahé in the evening. Overnight anchorage will be at Bel Ombre, where we'll have the opportunity for a night dive at its small wreck site.



DAY 7

In the morning the Maya's Dugong cruises toward the Ave Maria rock near La Digue. Not only is this an excellent dive site on its own merit, but this passage is also a common place to spot whale sharks as well. Following any encounters, the vessel will cruise back toward Mahé for overnight anchorage near the Ste Anne Marine Park. In the evening, we will have a final de-briefing and a farewell BBQ.

DAY 5

The vessel cruises across toward Praslin, arriving at Booby rock, where we'll have two opportunities to dive at this thrilling location for a variety of marine life. Although we will not have aerial support through the rest of the journey, we'll take advantage of the Dugong's tall observation deck to search for additional whale shark encounters along the way. With the experience gained from having the MCSS officials onboard, our guests will now be able to record details for any sightings on their own, for inclusion into the MCSS database. As an option, guests may also disembark at Anse Possession, Praslin, for an afternoon visit of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Vallee de Mai.



DAY 8

Disembarkation at the Inter Island Quay, Port Victoria, Mahé at 8.30 am.

Top: *Swimming with whale sharks/MCSS*
Centre: *Boat-based monitoring activities with guests getting ready for the first whale shark/MCSS*
Bottom: *The tranquil marine park of Baie Ternay, where excellent diving and snorkelling opportunities await/Henri Eskenazi*

DAY 6

After an early morning dive at Pointe Rouge, this leisurely day will be spent visiting Curieuse Island, where passengers will be able to explore its mountain pathways and mangrove boardwalk, as well as its giant tortoise farm. A beach BBQ will be arranged on the island for a late lunch and afternoon swim, before returning onboard for a night dive.



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THE ITINERARY

Whale sharks are wild animals and while MCSS have identified their usual favourite feeding places these can vary on even a day-to-day basis.

MCSS find the sharks using a microlight aircraft which does a complete survey around Mahé each morning to direct the monitoring boats into the best location for the afternoon. In the afternoons the aircraft directs the boats on to the sharks to ensure the maximum possible chance of success.

As such, our ability to locate the whale sharks is weather dependent as rain or high winds stop the microlight aircraft from flying. Because of this the itinerary should be regarded as a guide only and we will reschedule days to enable us to make the most of the situation during the week; days may also shift around due to poor sighting conditions or days when the sharks are not at the surface.



ABOUT THE MCSS PROGRAMME

The MCSS have been monitoring whale sharks around Seychelles since its pilot project in November 1996. The programme has grown steadily both in terms of scope and size and is now one of the most comprehensive whale shark research programmes globally. The programme is led by whale shark researcher Dr. David Rowat and receives financial support for specific project components from the Save Our Seas Foundation, which enables a wide range of activities to be implemented.

From its inception in 1996, the programme has relied upon the enthusiasm and support of the public in assisting with the gathering of data and this 'citizen science' has been the primary building block on which the programme is based. However, in order to maximise the value of the data collected, the monitoring systems require strict standardisation and while the public is directly involved in the in-water encounter activities, the data are handled by a team of intern volunteers who are trained in the necessary data capture activities and data entry to ensure compliance with standards.



Encounters

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ENCOUNTER CODE OF CONDUCT

Since 2003 whale sharks are a protected species in Seychelles, due largely to the work of the MCSS programme. All the monitoring activities are run according to the Encounter Code which was developed through two public workshops and approved by the Government of Seychelles. You will be fully briefed on this by the MCSS team aboard the Maya's Dugong.

GUEST PARTICIPATION

There are a number of activities that will be going on during the monitoring days, the most important being the identification of the whale sharks, which is largely done by in-water digital photography. There are also a number of environmental monitoring activities such as plankton tows and temperature / depth profiles, all of which the MCSS team will be pleased to have guests assist in, if they so wish. Back onboard the Maya's Dugong the team will process the information from the day's activities allowing guests to assist in the photo-identification of the sharks seen that afternoon.

Guests' participation in this whale shark monitoring programme expedition aboard Maya Dugong can be used to qualify for the PADI Project Aware 'Whale Shark Awareness' specialty qualification - please ask our crew for additional details. MCSS also offer a several other ways guests can help whale shark conservation such as by adopting a whale shark - the MCSS team will be pleased to discuss with passengers about these opportunities aboard.

Left: View from the MCSS microlight aircraft on a whale shark survey/**MCSS**

Center: Dr. David Rowat returning to the surface having marker tagged a shark at around 8 m from the surface/**Justin Spray-MCSS**

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Activities

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CRUISE FEATURES

Maya's Dugong is not merely a mode of transportation - it's a floating platform to enjoy a range of activities based from the boat. In addition to whale sharking excursions and a full-time dive guide (diving charged separately), this cruise also includes:

- Snorkelling Equipment
- Bottom-line Fishing Tackle (prohibited in marine parks)
- Two 2-seater kayaks

Also available onboard:

- Flat-screen TV in the Dining Salon/Lounge
- DVD player & Stereo
- Games, cards, small library
- Ice Machine
- Laundry Service (extra charge)

DIVING

Maya's Dugong is a certified PADI dive resort, with a full range of equipment onboard as well as a dedicated dive instructor with vast Indian Ocean experience. A variety of interesting dive sites will be accessible throughout the expedition, and may vary on each voyage depending on sea conditions, visibility and itinerary timings.

Maya's Dugong features a convenient rear deck platform allowing divers to easily access the water directly from the vessel. Other dives will utilise the vessel's tender boat for dives sites which are further afield or inaccessible by Maya's Dugong.

Available onboard: 18 dive tanks, 7 full diving sets for rent and 2 dive compressors.



Images courtesy Tony Baskeyfield

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About the Vessel

The M.V. Maya's Dugong is an oceanographic vessel with the space and comfort of a modern yacht, combined with the durability and functionality required for scientific and long-distance expeditions.

Originally built as a research vessel by the Canadian Government in 1966, the Maya's Dugong was completely retro-fitted in the early 2000s as a private yacht, before being overhauled once again in 2009 to accommodate charters and cabin cruise voyages. It now serves as an oceanographic and expedition cruising vessel throughout the Indian Ocean.



MV Maya's Dugong

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Accommodation

Maya's Dugong provides a rare blend of size, freedom and open space across its cabins and public areas, with the stylistic finishings, ambience and personalised service of a private yacht.

All cabins are equipped with air conditioning, reading lights and a storage cupboard. Accommodation is offered across three categories:

COMMANDER CABINS x3

These well-appointed cabins are the largest and most comfortable that Maya's Dugong has to offer. Situated on the top two decks of the vessel, these cabins boast en-suite bathrooms/showers as well as windows from which to view the beautiful coastal surrounds. Two of the Commander Cabins feature a double-bed plus an extra single bed, while one Commander Cabin offers two single beds in the cabin.

EXPLORER CABINS x4

Classic and comfortable, these cabins are situated below the main public-area decks. Complete with en-suite bathrooms/showers, there is one Explorer Cabin offering a double-bed plus a single bed, and three Explorer Cabins with two single beds and an extra fold-out bunk.

MARINER CABINS x2

Maya's Dugong also offers smaller cabins, typically reserved for scientists and naturalists, with 3 single bunks per cabin, with shared bathroom facilities between the two cabins.



Top: Commander Cabin; **Bottom left:** Explorer Cabin; **Bottom right:** Standard bathroom for Commander & Explorer Cabins

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CREW

Maya's Dugong boasts a high staff-to-guest ratio to ensure all of our passengers are well looked-after throughout the expedition. In addition to the captain, engineer, and two deckhands, all expedition cruises are staffed with two stewardesses, a dive instructor and a dedicated chef, as well as the naturalist tour leader.

DINING & CUISINE

Cruises aboard Maya's Dugong are full board (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and also include afternoon tea/coffee and cake. A dedicated chef prepares an enticing blend of authentic Indian Ocean cuisine and traditional European fare.

BEVERAGES

Table water and tea & coffee are served with all meals. A full range of beverages are also available onboard at extra charge, including mineral water, soft drinks, beer, wine, spirits and champagne. Price list available on request.

FACILITIES

Large public areas and facilities allow for maximum enjoyment of guests' time onboard Maya's Dugong. A spacious dining salon and lounge hosts guests in air conditioned comfort for meals and entertainment, and the outdoor leisure deck provides opportunities for al fresco dining and also serves as a comfortable lounge area.

There is also plenty of open deck space onboard for sun bathing and relaxing, and a spacious bridge and observation deck allow guests to take in the adventure with a captain's eye view of all the surroundings.



Facilities Onboard

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TRAVEL TIPS

- ☼ 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.
- ☼ 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)
- ☼ Your safety and comfort are our highest priority. In the event of adverse conditions, the itinerary is subject to change at the captain's discretion.

**For more information on the programme, bookings and rates, please contact:
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