

Gentle Giants of the Sea

SEYCHELLES WHALE SHARK ODYSSEY

Seychelles Whale Shark Odyssey - 7 nights on SY Sea Star & SY Sea Bird

A joint initiative between Silhouette Cruises and the whale shark monitoring programme of the Marine Conservation Society of Seychelles (MCSS), this 7-night live-aboard 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.

Accommodation on Sea Star/Sea Bird

This programme hosts guests onboard the SY Sea Star and SY Sea Bird - ideal platforms 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 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 vulnerable species.



About 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.

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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.

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 vessel.



Pictured from left to right:
-MCSS Excursion boat preparing for encounter
-Whale Shark tagging exercise
-Whale shark accompanied by remoras

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 vessel 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 the vessel 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.

*This cruise is part of our limited edition cruise portfolio, meaning we operate departures of this cruise on only a few specific dates within the year. However, full boat charters modelled after this cruise can be organised at certain periods of the year, and as according to our availability. Please contact us for more info!

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Day 1 - Saturday



Embarkation from Mahé at the Inter Island Quay, Port Victoria at 10.30 am. After the captain's welcome briefing, the vessel 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.

Day 2 - Sunday



Cruising around Mahé's northwestern coast we reach 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. Meanwhile MCSS pilots will be overhead in its micro-lite to relay whale shark sightings to the team. We'll meet up with the MCSS vessel for some afternoon excursions in search of any whale sharks that have been spotted, followed by overnight anchorage in Baie Ternay.

Day 3 - Monday



A southerly course brings the vessel 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 before dinner, 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 - Tuesday



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-light'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 5 - Wednesday



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 our 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 6 - Thursday



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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Day 7 - Friday



In the morning the vessel 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 8 - Saturday



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.
- ✿ 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).
- ✿ 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.
- ✿ Water skiing and tube rides are available at very reasonable rates. Snorkelling equipment and kayaks are included in the cost of the cruise.
- ✿ All of 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 all available on board. Price list available on request.

Images: Justin Spray/MCSS, Alexis Rosenfeld,
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