

Small Ship Adventure Co.

Specialising in Small Ship Cruising Worldwide



CLASSIC SEYCHELLES

WITH THE COMOROS & ZANZIBAR

Aboard the Clipper Odyssey
January 24 – February 10, 2012

ITINERARY

Tuesday & Wednesday, January 24 & 25, 2012

Depart to Europe, arrive in Europe, continuing to Mahé on your independent overnight flight to the Seychelles.

Thursday, January 26

Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles

Arrive Mahé, transfer to our hotel for brunch, and enjoy a day at leisure to relax. Gather this evening for a welcome dinner and briefing.

Friday, January 27

Sainte Anne Marine Reserve / Embark *Clipper Odyssey*

Enjoy a day of snorkeling in Sainte Anne Marine National Park—a wonderful introduction to the Seychelles. This group of six islands, off the coast of Mahé, was the first marine park to be founded in the Indian Ocean, over 30 years ago. Its history evokes tales of maritime lore from centuries past. We enjoy a traditional Creole lunch in the park before returning to Victoria to embark the *Clipper Odyssey*.

Saturday, January 28

La Digue

Famed biologist Sir Julian Huxley once described the Seychelles as akin to Hawaii and Tahiti in the 1700s, an untouched Garden of Eden, and no island could be more deserving of this description than La Digue. Giant pink granite boulders and swaying palms offset postcard-perfect white beaches. We travel like the local inhabitants and walk or bike along picturesque, sandy roads. We pass quaint balconied houses and shops, a vanilla plantation, and a copra factory to reach the small Veuve Nature Reserve, where we may observe the endangered Seychelles paradise flycatcher in its native habitat. We also watch for the yellow bittern, Seychelles swiftlet, and comman waxbill. Spend time on one of the world's most breathtakingly beautiful beaches, Anse La Source d'Argent, where we beachcomb.

Sunday, January 29

Praslin

Praslin Island's enchanting Vallée de Mai National Park is a World Heritage Site. We investigate the high-canopied primeval palm forest, home to 6,000 coco-de-mer palms with mammoth fan-shaped fronds. These astonishing trees grow over 100 feet tall and live 800 – 1,000 years. The palm bears the world's largest nut, weighing 20 – 40 pounds. Several other endemic palm species, as well as the Seychelles flying fox, populate this magical valley. We may spot a rare Seychelles black parrot and other birds of notable interest, including the Seychelles blue pigeon, Seychelles swiftlet, and Seychelles bulbul. Hikers have their choice of walks permitting viewing of not only birds overhead, but several other unique animals, such as bronze and green day geckos, the Seychelles skink, and two forms of endemic snail. While Praslin is the second largest of the Seychelles islands after Mahé, it remains a tiny outpost of tranquility where life is slow-paced and relaxed.

Monday, January 30

Amirante Island Group

The Amirante Islands are named in honor of Portuguese admiral Vasco da Gama's 1501 visit. During an expedition stop at Poivre Island, we take Zodiacs ashore for beachcombing, nature walks, birding, and a visit to the Poivre copra plantation. Snorkel or dive over coral gardens inhabited by brilliantly colored tropical fish as manta rays glide through the waters below and black-naped terns soar in the skies above.

Tuesday, January 31

At Sea

Spend a relaxing day at sea and attend lectures recapping our experiences thus far.

Wednesday, February 1

Astove Atoll

We land by Zodiac on this deserted island's sandy beach. Part of the Aldabra Group, this island was formerly inhabited by African slaves who escaped a Portuguese ship in 1760. A former copra plantation, the island's houses, drying sheds, and other buildings are in various states of disrepair since being abandoned in the 1980s. Ashore, mature casuarina and Indian almond trees host the finely woven pendant nests of the local sunbird. Snorkelers and divers delight in the crystal clear waters and undisturbed reefs populated by turtles, groupers, clouds of tropical fishes, and underwater arches encrusted with colorful corals.

Thursday & Friday, February 2 & 3

Aldabra Atoll

We spend two full days at magnificent Aldabra, a World Heritage Site, and a highlight of our adventures. With a perimeter of 70 miles, Aldabra is one of the largest atolls in the world, comprising four major islands separated by channels. Because of the atoll's extreme isolation, many of Aldabra's species are endemics. Giant Indian Ocean tortoises—estimated to number over 100,000—roam wild over the island. Tide permitting, we take our Zodiacs through the narrow pass to skim through a landscape of fascinating eroded limestone topography. The tides have sculpted small islets into fantastical formations known as *champignons*, or “mushrooms.”

Hundreds of lesser and great frigatebirds soar overhead as we search for the rare Aldabra white-throated rail, the only flightless bird found on any Indian Ocean island. Robber crabs, whose claws are strong enough to crack coconuts, scamper across the turf. Enjoy a drift snorkel through the pass, where we may spot coral gardens teeming with life, into a lagoon populated by turtles and eagle rays. Visit the small scientific research station on Picard Island and photograph the mighty tortoises of this magical, isolated island that few travelers ever have the opportunity to see.

Saturday, February 4

Assumption

Assumption Island is renowned for the clarity of its waters and its profuse undersea life. These qualities led Jacques Cousteau to film much of his documentary *The Silent World* at Assumption. We snorkel and dive among the corals, with excellent views of undersea life such as clams, nudibranchs, and well over 100 species of fish, including black lionfish, blue-ribbon eels, black-streak surgeonfish, and Indian Ocean steephead parrotfish. Assumption is also home to about 100 giant tortoises introduced to the island from Aldabra.

Sunday, February 5

Mayotte, Comoros Islands

Mayotte is an overseas territory of France, yet geographically it remains part of the Comoros group. We stroll across the bay. While the French colonial legacy endures in town, a drive in the countryside reveals the traditional *bangas*, or bachelor's houses, each unique in style. Sleepy fishing villages adorn both golden and black sandy beaches backed by swaying bamboo groves in this tranquil setting that the islanders describe as *au bout du monde*—at the end of the world.

Monday, February 6

Grande Comore

Ruggedly beautiful, Grande Comore's landscape is dominated by the world's largest active volcano, Mount Karthala. Disembark in Iconi, one of the oldest settlements on the island, and take a short drive to view the ruins of an 18th-century palace. Continue through scenic countryside to a plantation where we learn about the cultivation of ylang-ylang and exotic spices. Our tour ends in Moroni where we visit the small museum, the medina, and colorful market with a wide array of fruit, spices, and handicrafts.

This afternoon we snorkel or dive off the coast and admire the numerous coral species that thrive here.

Tuesday, February 7

At Sea

Enjoy the soft Indian Ocean breezes as we cruise toward the coast of Africa. Lecturers prepare us for the natural and cultural wonders ahead.

Wednesday, February 8

Pemba Island, Tanzania

Pemba Island's rolling landscape is a mosaic of forests, swamps, and mangroves, interspersed with plantations that collectively produce more cloves than Zanzibar. We explore Ngezi Forest,

the largest area of moist forest surviving on Pemba, where we hope to spot the endemic Pemba flying fox as well as red colobus and vervet monkeys. We also visit the ruins of Qanbalu, a Muslim settlement dating back to the 11th century, where the remains of a large mosque can still be seen. Our tour ends in the town of Chake Chake, where we browse the market and enjoy impressive views of the bay. Snorkeling and diving is also superb off the west coast, with excellent visibility and a host of colorful reef fish and large pelagics.

Thursday, February 9

Zanzibar / Dar es Salaam

Zanzibar lives up to its storied Arabian Nights reputation—a lush palm-fringed island, often referred to as the Bali of East Africa. In the morning we explore the nature trails of Jozani Natural Forest Reserve to spot the red colobus monkey. Photographers will have a field day photographing this colorful, frisky primate as it roams throughout the park and leaps through the canopy. Other species we may spot include Skye's monkeys, small buck, and bush pigs.

In the afternoon, explore the labyrinthine alleyways of old Stone Town, with its fascinating fort, souks, cathedrals, mosques, and sultans' palaces. The museum contains memorabilia from explorer David Livingstone's travels. We set sail for Dar es Salaam this evening where we overnight pierside.

Friday, February 10

Dar es Salaam / Disembark /

Disembark the *Clipper Odyssey* early this morning and transfer to the airport for homeward flights