

Small Ship Adventure Co.

Specialising in Small Ship Cruising Worldwide



ULTIMATE SEYCHELLES

With Aldabra Atoll

Aboard the *Clipper Odyssey*
January 13—27, 2012

ITINERARY

Friday & Saturday, January 13 & 14, 2012

Depart / Europe

Depart and arrive in Europe. Connect with your independent overnight flight to the Seychelles.

Sunday, January 15

Victoria, Mahé Island, 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.

Monday, January 16

Cerf Island, 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 was the first marine park to be founded in the Indian Ocean, over 30 years ago. Its history evokes tales of pirates and buried treasure from centuries past. We enjoy a traditional Creole lunch in the park before returning to Victoria to embark the *Clipper Odyssey*.

Tuesday, January 17

Praslin and Curieuse Islands

This morning we arrive at Praslin Island to visit enchanting Vallée de Mai National Park, a World Heritage Site. Here we investigate the high-canopied, primeval palm forest, home to 4,000 coco-de-mer palms. 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 the rare Seychelles black parrot and other birds of notable interest, including the Seychelles blue-pigeon, cave swiftlet, and Seychelles bulbul. Various walks reveal other unique animals such as bronze and green day geckos, the Seychelles skink, and two forms of endemic snail.

In the afternoon we visit Curieuse, a tiny island with a sanctuary for giant land tortoises. On nature walks through dense forest dotted with towering takamaka trees, we search for the free-roaming tortoises. We also have the opportunity to snorkel and dive along the surrounding reef.

Wednesday, January 18

The Amirante Island Group

During an expedition stop at Poivre Island, we take Zodiacs ashore for beachcombing, nature walks, 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.

Thursday, January 19

Alphonse Island Group

In the Alphonse Island group we experience the beauty and serenity of the three islands that lie in the heart of the Seychelles Archipelago. Their remote location provides many opportunities for unspoiled exploration, including beachcombing on soft, white-sand beaches, and snorkeling or diving to search for Madras snappers and the nine species of butterflyfish found here.

Friday, January 20

Sailing the Indian Ocean

Relax at sea and enjoy lectures by our expedition staff who prepare us for our time at Aldabra Atoll.

Saturday & Sunday, January 21 & 22

Aldabra Atoll

We spend two full days at magnificent Aldabra, a World Heritage Site, and a highlight of our voyage. 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 unique endemics. Giant Indian Ocean tortoises—which have been estimated to number over 100,000—roam wild on the island. Tide permitting, we take Zodiacs through a narrow pass to a landscape of fascinating eroded limestone topography. The tides have sculpted small islets into fantastic formations known as *champignons*, or “mushrooms.” Hundreds of lesser and great frigatebirds soar overhead as we search the terrain for the rare, flightless Aldabra white-throated rail. 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 visit.

Monday, January 23

Astove Atoll

We land by Zodiac on a sandy beach bordered by lush vegetation on this deserted island, part of the Aldabra Group and 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. Mature casuarina and Indian almond trees host the finely woven pendant nests of the local sunbird. Along the atoll's vertical reef wall, snorkelers and divers delight in the crystal clear waters populated by turtles, clouds of tropical fish and colorful corals.

Tuesday, January 24

Sailing the Indian Ocean

Watch for whales, dolphins, and porpoises cruising the waters as we head northward through the Indian Ocean.

Wednesday, January 25

Expedition Stop

Make an expedition stop at one of the Seychelles' many low-lying coral atolls. Snorkel or dive over pristine reefs or beachcomb along powdery, white-sand shores.

Thursday, January 26

Cousin and La Digue Islands

Our ship anchors at Cousin, a nature reserve owned by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation and administered by Birdlife International. The reserve protects endangered species, notably the Seychelles fody, brush warbler, magpie robin, and Seychelles blue-pigeon. A nearly uninhabited island, its rocky hills are the breeding place of thousands of fairy terns. The birds are densely clustered and unafraid, making this site like no other on Earth. We may also encounter the resident group of giant tortoises.

In the afternoon we stop at La Digue, an island whose beauty surpasses the imagination. Famed biologist Sir Julian Huxley once described the Seychelles as akin to Hawaii and Tahiti in the 1700s, an untouched Garden of Eden. No island could be more deserving of this description than La Digue, where huge granite boulders and swaying palms frame the picture-perfect, pink- and white-sand beaches. Only about 2,000 people live in this paradise, where ox and cart is the traditional mode of transportation. We travel at the leisurely pace of the locals, on foot or by bicycle along picturesque sandy roads. We pass quaint, balconied houses and shops, a vanilla plantation, and a copra operation 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, cave swiftlet, and common waxbill. Enjoy time on one of the world's most breathtakingly beautiful beaches, Anse La Source d'Argent.

Friday, January 27

Victoria, Mahé Island / Disembark

Disembark in the early morning and transfer to the airport for your independent flights homeward