

# 14-night Aldabra Expedition - 2019

**Embarkation: 25 Feb 2019, Mahe**  
**Disembarkation: 11 Mar 2019, Mahe**



Silhouette Cruises Base, Mahe | Photo: Bill Kinton

## Day 1 - Embarkation aboard the MV Maya's Dugong at Mahé

Embarkation aboard MV Maya's Dugong at 10:00AM. Guests will be briefed about the cruise program. Around midday we start our expedition route towards the Amirantes - Desroches Island.

## Day 2 - Desroches Island

The Amirantes is a linear chain of coral islands and atolls west of the granitics with Desroches the largest and nearest to Mahe, measuring 6 km long and 1.5 km wide is concealed beneath the shade of coconut palms and endemic island vegetation. 11km of immaculate white sandy beaches wrap around island entirely, with crystal blue water lapping at the shore.



Alphonse | Photo: Tai Chen



Alphonse | Photo: Tai Chen

## Day 3 - Alphonse

The Alphonse Group consists of two neighboring atolls, Alphonse Atoll and St Francois Atoll, the latter comprising of two islands St Francois and Bijoutier. These are some of the most beautiful islands of Seychelles. Alphonse is shaped like an arrowhead, with trails of white foam flying out behind it as though it was skimming through the water. It was once a productive plantation, generating 100,000 coconuts a month but today this is abandoned. The diving around these islands is excellent, though it is not for beginners as currents can be strong. Features include forests of tall Gorgonian fan corals, shoals of barracuda and other predators together with the occasional Hawksbill Turtle that drifts by.

## Day 4 - Crossing towards the Aldabra Group

## Day 5 & 6 - Cosmoledo

A visit to Cosmoledo is comparable to one to Aldabra but in some ways, Cosmoledo even surpasses this famous atoll in its extreme atmosphere of remoteness. The island is uninhabited and very rarely visited by the outside world.

There are some bird species on Cosmoledo not found on Aldabra, including enormous seabird colonies with Seychelles largest populations of Red-footed Booby, Masked Booby and Sooty Tern. A race of Madagascar White-eye (named menalis) is unique to the island. It is the last breeding site for Brown Booby, extinct everywhere else in the islands. The diving is also excellent and the marine life is very rich. The corals have survived here more intact than elsewhere in the western Indian Ocean. Many turtles can be seen, including very young ones, in the shallow waters of the lagoon, close to the main island of Menal. Cosmoledo has also gained a reputation as one of the world's best fly-fishing sites, yet it has remained off limits to all but a few determined enthusiasts because of the difficulties of reaching this lonely outpost.

We visit the deserted settlement and dive the West Island of Cosmoledo (Menal) where turtles abound.



Cosmoledo | Photo: Jaki



Cosmoledo | Photo: ICS team



Aldabra | Photo: Martin Harvey



Aldabra | Photo: Michel Vely



Aldabra | Photo: Tai Chen

## Days 7 & 8 & 9 - Aldabra

Often called the Jewel in the crown of Seychelles, Aldabra is the world's latest raised coral atoll and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With an area of approximately 150sq km it comprises about one-third of the landmass of Seychelles, but has no human population other than the Warden and staff of the Research Station on Picard. It is a tropical island wilderness, seen by only a few privileged visitors each year. It has the world's largest population of Giant Tortoise, with around 100,000 of these prehistoric survivors.

There are many plants and birds not found elsewhere and one of the world's most important breeding populations of the endangered Green Turtle. Birds include the Aldabra Rail, the last surviving flightless bird of the Indian Ocean and frigate birds. Many other endemic land birds can be seen ashore, including Aldabra Drongo, Aldabra Fody and Madagascar Sacred Ibis, together with the world's largest population of giant tortoises.

We visit the Aldabra Research station and the old settlement, cruise through the West and Main Channel and diveshore at Passe Dubois, Polymnie, Anse Var, settlement reef, Anse Malis and Main Channel, experiencing the exhilaration of being swept along by the shoals, observing both pelagic and reef fish in the shallow waters of the lagoon.

Drift diving is exceptional in the channels that fill and empty the lagoon with the tides. Shoals of fish stand sentry at these entrances to the lagoon, where sharks and other predators sweep by as they commute between the open ocean and the lagoon. In recent years, dugongs have been seen, a sign that this rare mammal may one day return to breed in Seychelles.

## Day 10 - Assumption

Assumption was laid waste by guano mining around the turn of the 20th century. This was the fate Aldabra escaped: wiping out seabird colonies including Abbott's Booby, now restricted to Christmas Island. However, the vegetation is now slowly recovering and there are plans for the rehabilitation of the island. One day it could become a mini-Aldabra. There is a small human population, connected by air to Mahé, though flights are few and far between. There is a long, beautiful arc of coral sand on one side of the island, beyond which the marine life is very rich and diving is excellent. Shoals of snappers, butterfly fish and angelfish flit between the corals in one of the most colorful and diverse reefs of Seychelles.



MV Maya's Dugong at Assumption | Photo: Alphonse team



Astove Wall | Photo: Axel Schwannhaeuser



Astove Wall | Photo: Janos Rautonen

## Day 11 - Astove

Astove is surrounded by deep waters where many a ship has come to grief on its treacherous reefs. The fringing reef averages about 250 meters from the shoreline and beyond this, the floor plummets steeply. This wall of corals is probably the best dive site in the Indian Ocean and indeed has been rated by diving experts as one of the finest dive sites in the world. Hundreds of species of fish, Green Turtles and even the anchors of wrecked ships are to be seen.

Snorkelling is also excellent on the edge of the drop off. Ashore there are graves of shipwrecked sailors, bleached turtle bones and abandoned buildings including the residence of a former Manager. Laid out around a courtyard in the style of a Moorish palace, it must once have been an impressive if somewhat incongruous sight on a remote island. A short walk across the island leads to the shallow lagoon where Caspian Terns, rare encountered in an ocean setting, dive for fish.

We visit the old manager's house including the incongruous Veevers-Carter house and old chapel, then cross the island to the lagoon. We dive the West walls.

## Day 12 - Crossing towards Bijoutier

## Day 13 - Bijoutier (Alphonse Group)

If you were looking for a dream island, the uninhabited island of Bijoutier is it. A circle of white sand capped with bright green vegetation, fringed by purple reefs and turquoise sea.

## Day 14 - St Joseph (Amirantes)

## Day 15 - Disembarkation at Mahe, at apr. 11:00AM



Bijoutier | Photo: Axel Schwannhaeuser