

SPECIAL
OFFER - SAVE
£500
PER PERSON

INDIAN OCEAN STEPPING STONES

An island hopping expedition from Mahe to Madagascar
aboard the MS Hebridean Sky

22nd November to 8th December 2023



NOBLE CALEDONIA



Nosy Hara

Escape to warmer climates over the winter with a voyage aboard the MS Hebridean Sky in the wonderful Indian Ocean, discovering some of the most beautiful tropical islands on earth in the company of just over 100 fellow guests. Our journey includes some fascinating and exotic calls combining the stunning islands of the Seychelles including the magnificent Aldabra group of islands with the natural wonders of Madagascar.

The first part of our adventure is dedicated to the Seychelles and some of the most captivating islands in the world. Amongst the highlights of our time in the Seychelles will be the Aldabra Islands, the last breeding ground of the giant tortoise and in addition to seeing some of these endearing creatures we should also encounter dolphins, turtles and whales as well as countless birds including the flightless rail, the last flightless bird in the Indian Ocean. To explore the abundant crystal-clear waters of the vast lagoon and to set foot on atolls which have never been exploited by the hand of man is a rare experience.

Our voyage continues to Madagascar, the world's 'eighth continent', where we have a week to explore this extraordinary country that is still relatively unknown amongst even the most serious of travellers. The term 'unique' is often an overused description in the travel world but certainly applies to the island of Madagascar where the animals, plants, landscapes and people that make up this thousand-mile-long island are unlike anywhere else in the world. There is minimal infrastructure in many parts of the island and for those wishing to explore in some depth, doing so by small ship is far more preferable than by any other means.

This itinerary is a veritable feast of beauty and the natural world and with the vessel's fleet of Zodiac landing craft we can reach the unreachable, landing on remote beaches, walking through verdant rainforest and national parks and getting close to some unique flora and fauna. Your experience will be made all the more memorable by our expert crew and officers who, along with our expedition team of marine biologists, ornithologists and botanists have many years of experience in the Indian Ocean.



What to Expect

Flexibility is the key to an expedition cruise; sometimes the whole day's schedule will be changed to maximise your experience, something that would not be possible on a large cruise ship. Each day holds something new and below are some extracts from the ship's log from previous expeditions which will provide you with an idea of what to expect.

Mahajanga & Ankarafantsika National Park, Madagascar: This morning we were up bright eyed and bushy tailed in readiness for an exciting day. Women in traditional dress greeted us on the slipway and our transport waited at the end of a strip of market stalls selling local crafts. The convoy of minibuses departed Mahajanga driving through the busy streets before heading out in the countryside. Savannah like landscape could be seen for miles on either side of the tarmac road. The savannah gave way to large swathes of rice paddies. Local rice farmers were seen harvesting the rice, children waved from the roadside, as we passed through beautiful villages. We arrived at the Ankarafantsika National Park, a mere two hours after leaving the dock. Immediately after arriving, we saw a troop of brown lemur and the gorgeous Coquerel's sifaka expertly negotiating their way through the canopy. Our guides took us on prepared trails through the dry forest,

spotting a variety of bird species, reptiles, and of course, lemur. Highlights included an eye-height view of a paradise fly-catcher incubating on a nest; a female Milne-Edwards sportive lemur with her juvenile resting on a tree trunk, iguanas basking in a variety of different body positions in spots of sunlight and, the fantastic spot of the Madagascan fish eagle. Combined we saw 51 different species of bird and reptile, and five species of lemur. What an incredible day!

Nosy Tanikely: Instead of using the Zodiacs this morning, local boats ferried us to the shore of Nosy Tanikely, a small island rising steeply from the beautiful palm fringed beach on which we arrived. One highlight was being able to snorkel among the coral reef that was close to shore. The fish diversity of the relatively small reef was impressive and a friendly Hawksbill turtle swam by. The island was equally impressive. Walking up the concrete summit path was well worth it, and we were treated to an acrobatic display by a group of brown lemurs. The panoramic view from the lighthouse was stunning and only bettered by the white-tailed tropicbirds flying close by. Those that walked around the island were treated to seeing rufus and Madagascar flying fox flying but also sleeping in the shade.



Ankarafantsika National Park



Nosy Hara



Giant tortoise, Aldabra



Broad-billed roller

The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Mahe, Seychelles. Fly by scheduled indirect flight.

Day 2 Mahe. Arrive this afternoon and transfer to the MS Hebridean Sky in Port Victoria. Enjoy welcome drinks and dinner as we sail tonight.

Days 3 & 4 Inner Seychelles. We have two days to explore the islands of the Inner Seychelles and hope to include a call at Praslin to explore the 'Vallee de Mai', the last remnant of the original high canopied Seychelles palm forest and home to the coco de mer. We will walk its paths looking out for the rare black parrot and enjoying its natural beauty. See Grande Soeur, an idyllic uninhabited island. Spend time walking the island trails which link the island's white sand beaches and maybe catch sight of some of the giant Aldabra tortoises or enjoy a snorkelling opportunity in the turquoise waters. We hope to anchor off Aride, one of the finest and most important seabird islands in the Indian Ocean. Over one million seabirds breed on the island including tropical shearwater, lesser noddy, frigatebirds and roseate tern and five of the species are unique to the Seychelles such as the Seychelles warbler and Seychelles magpie robin. The island is largely

covered in native woodland including the endemic wright's gardenia, a shrub with beautifully scented flowers found nowhere else in the world. Sail to Curieuse, a rugged island which was once home to a leper colony and now houses an eco-museum and visitor centre. The island is an important nesting site for hawksbill turtles and boasts endemic vine and mangroves which we explore on an island walk.

Day 5 Alphonse Islands. There are three islands in the Alphonse group which is located directly south of the Amirantes. As we approach the islands over lunch, you will understand why they are regarded by many to be the most beautiful of the 115 islands in the Seychelles archipelago. On the main island the circular lagoon offers good snorkelling and there are several tracks across the island for us to enjoy an afternoon of island walks.

Day 6 At Sea. Enjoy a relaxing day at sea as we head to the Outer Seychelles islands. Our lecture programme will continue or maybe find a spot on deck to watch for wildlife.

Days 7 & 8 Aldabra Islands. We have two days at the Aldabra group of islands and our itinerary will be in the hands of our Expedition

Leader and Captain who will monitor the local conditions to ensure we maximise our time here. Whilst our itinerary is flexible we will plan to call at the island of Assumption. The island was ruthlessly plundered for its vast deposits of guano in the early 20th century but peace has returned and the wildlife of rare birds and green turtles are once again in abundance. Our time here will be spent beachcombing, on a nature walk or snorkelling. We also plan time on Aldabra, the island referred to by Sir Julian Huxley as "One of nature's treasures and should belong to the whole world". Aldabra is unique and every time we call at what is believed to be the world's largest atoll we find something new of interest. Sightings have been made of the extremely rare white-throated rail and the atoll is also home to the world's second largest colony of frigate birds and the largest crab, the coconut crab. Whilst exploring by Zodiac it is difficult to know in which direction to look. The clear blue seas abound with colourful life, the skies are alive with varied birdlife and ashore giant land tortoises forage as they have done for millions of years. We will explore Picard Island with a short walk to see some of the thousands of tortoises and numerous robber crabs. We will include as much as possible during our time on Aldabra making landings on South Island and trips into the lagoon, a vast 17 mile stretch of shallow clear water. From our Zodiacs we can watch the everchanging undersea world and snorkel in colourful coral waters teeming with marine life.

Day 9 Diego Suarez, Madagascar. After a morning at sea we arrive in Madagascar and enter dramatic Diego Suarez, a stunning natural

harbour with a cosmopolitan mix of inhabitants including Creoles, Indians, Chinese, Comorans and Arabs. This afternoon choose from a city tour visiting the Commonwealth Cemetery and Place Joffre, or the Malagasy rainforest at the Mount Amber National Park. Dividing into short and long walk parties we will go in search of lemurs, chameleons and endemic birds as we explore the rainforest.

Day 10 Nosy Hara. As we cruise around the northern coast of Madagascar we will find a number of strangely shaped limestone islets that dot the aquamarine-coloured sea. The expedition team will decide on the most suitable island for landing, such as Nosy Hara with its abundant birdlife and great places to swim off the beach. We will spend the day exploring the island on foot, walking through dense woodland and observing the unusual vegetation. Alternatively, join a Zodiac cruise around the islands and a chance to snorkel over the coral.

Day 11 Nosy Tanikely. Spend the morning at the Nosy Tanikely Island Marine Reserve, an uninhabited island which offers snorkelling opportunities and wonderful beaches. We will take the chance to either swim in the clear waters or snorkel over the corals keeping an eye out for reef fish, turtles and morays. Alternatively, our naturalists will lead guided walks on the island where we may see the resident lemurs, fruit bats and hermit crabs and enjoy fantastic views from the lighthouse on the island's highest point. We will sail in the early afternoon.

Day 12 Mahajanga. Mahajanga is a major port in northwest Madagascar situated on the Betsiboka River and



Exploring by Zodiac



Hawksbill sea turtle



Panther chameleon



Avenue des Baobabs

is our base for a full day excursion to the Ankarafantsika National Park. This deciduous forest is a haven for birds, lemurs and reptiles and on a choice of walks, we will explore with our guides. Eight species of lemur have been observed here including the famous Microcebus, the smallest primate in the world. Meanwhile over 120 species of birds nest here and we will keep an eye out for the Madagascan fish eagle and banded kestrel whilst the 44 species of reptile include chameleon, turtles and crocodiles that live in Lake Ravelobe. We will enjoy lunch in the park and in the afternoon there will be options to join further walks or watch for birdlife at the nearby lake before returning to the MS Hebridean Sky.

Day 13 At Sea. Our lecture programme resumes as we continue our journey around the Madagascan coast.

Day 14 Morondava. From our anchorage off the town of Morondava, we will use the Zodiacs to land on the local beach and from here there will be a choice of excursions to explore the local region. On a half day morning tour we will visit the Avenue des Baobabs. Of the eight baobab species in the world, six are endemic to Madagascar and here we will see the Adansonia grandidieri species with a row of 20 to 25 trees which border the gravel road. We will learn about the trees and their spiritual significance before returning to Morondava and exploring the local market. Alternatively, join a full day excursion to Kirindy Forest. Situated approximately a two hour drive from Morondava, we will pass the Avenue des Baobabs as we travel north. Kirindy is a 10,000

hectare, dry deciduous forest, one of the most endangered in the world where the flora and fauna includes many endemic species. Here we find three species of baobab, many birds and reptiles including snakes, tortoises and lizards. Eight species of lemur reside here including the pale form marked lemur.

Day 15 Tulear. We arrive in Tulear at lunchtime. This afternoon choose to visit the Antsoakay Arboretum which is entirely devoted to the conservation of the plants from the south west of Madagascar and, after more than 30 years of hard work, offers a densely kept selection of flora presenting a typical sub-arid thicket with baobab trees towering over the smaller plants. We will see the four hectare botanical garden which comprises over 900 species of plants of which 90% are endemic to the region. Alternatively, visit the Reniala Private Reserve, a small area of just 60 hectares but containing a spiny forest which is unique to south eastern Madagascar. The park is home to 200 plant species including baobabs as well as being a haven for birders with sightings of paradise flycatchers, Madagascar hoopoe and Madagascar crested drongo.

Day 16 Tulear to London. Disembark this morning and transfer to the airport for our specially chartered flight to Johannesburg. Connect here with our onward scheduled flight to London.

Day 17 London. Arrive this morning.



Lemur

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

SPECIAL OFFER – SAVE £500 PER PERSON FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY

Deck	Suite Category	Brochure Price	Special Offer Price
Amundsen	Standard	£10495	£9995
Byrd	Superior	£10795	£10295
Mawson	Premium	£10995	£10495
Mawson	Corner	£11395	£10895
Scott	Deluxe Balcony	£12395	£11895
Shackleton	Owner's Balcony	£12895	£12395
Shackleton	Hebridean	£13895	£13395
Amundsen	Standard for sole use	£13495	£12995
Byrd	Superior for sole use	£14095	£13595

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel from London to Mahe and from Johannesburg to London • Specially chartered flight from Tulear to Johannesburg • 14 nights aboard the MS Hebridean Sky on a full board basis • House wine, beer and soft drinks with lunch & dinner • Noble Caledonia expedition team • Gratuities • Transfers • Airport taxes • Port taxes.
Not Included: Travel insurance, Madagascar visa.

MS HEBRIDEAN SKY



Alfresco Dining



Owner's Balcony Suite



The Restaurant

The much loved MS Hebridean Sky is one of our two flagships and sister vessel to the MS Island Sky. Both vessels were built in the same shipyard in Italy at similar times and share the same excellent attributes that make them two of the finest small ships in the world. With a maximum passenger capacity of only 118, a vessel of her size is capable of carrying many more but instead the MS Hebridean Sky has the benefit of unusually large suites, luxuriously appointed public areas and spacious outside decks.

Your Suite

On board there are 59 exceptionally spacious and well-designed suites. All feature a sitting area and some have private balconies. The feeling of luxury is enhanced by the wood panelling and brass, which predominates throughout the vessel conveying the atmosphere of a private yacht. The passenger accommodation is arranged over five decks and all suites have outside views with those on the Scott and Shackleton Decks featuring private balconies. Each suite affords considerable comfort with en-suite bathroom featuring vanity unit with sink and walk-in shower, large wardrobes, dressing table with large mirror and stool and excellent storage. There is a mini-fridge, flat screen television and a telephone in each suite. Refillable water bottles, towelling dressing gowns and slippers are also provided for your comfort. Other facilities include a programmable electronic safe, hairdryer, assorted Molton Brown toiletries and individually controlled air-conditioning and heating. Soft hues and blended tones enhance the traditional maritime style making the passenger accommodation an inviting and relaxing place to be.

Your Dining

With only one sitting and a maximum of just over 100 passengers, the cuisine on board the MS Hebridean Sky is of a consistent superior quality that befits such a vessel. In keeping with the informal atmosphere on board, when dining you are able to choose your seating arrangements and choice of restaurants at your leisure; whether that be joining a table of four to six other passengers in the elegant à la carte Restaurant or, outside buffet-style on the Lido Deck in the evening sunshine. In the main Restaurant, breakfast is served buffet-style, with certain items cooked to order on request. Lunch and dinner menus offer plenty of choice, often reflecting the daily catch and local delicacies. The Welcome and Farewell dinners are a sumptuous five course affair. To enhance your dining experience further a selection of wines is included with both meals. Afternoon tea and pre-dinner canapés take place in either the comfort of the Lounge or out on the Lido Deck when the weather is favourable. Tea and coffee are also available 24 hours a day. Special diets can be catered for with sufficient notice.



The Library



Superior Suite



The Club

Your Space

The spacious and finely decorated public rooms include a large Lounge on the Byrd Deck featuring a selection of seating options from individual armchairs and sofas to side cushioned benches. Daily briefings given by the Cruise Director and talks from Guest Speakers and expedition staff take place in the Lounge. In addition to the main Lounge, there is also The Club, located on the Mawson Deck which features the main bar. The Club also features a 24-hour tea and coffee station. Towards the aft of the ship on the Mawson Deck is the Library. Well stocked with reference books pertaining to the destinations the vessel is visiting and a selection of essential reads, you will not find yourself short of excellent literature on board. A collection of games and devices to access the internet via the ship's satellite can also be found in the library. Access to the ship's satellite Wi-Fi via your own device is complimentary on board (*signal strength varies depending on location and demand*). The main Restaurant, which can seat all guests at one sitting, is located on the Amundsen Deck, and outside there is a rear Lido Deck located on the Scott Deck where meals are served in warm weather under shade. Further to this on the top Shackleton Deck there is an observation area, complete with sun loungers for sunbathing, relaxing with a book or catching up with fellow travellers. The Promenade Deck wraps around the whole ship providing outstanding views. There is also a small beauty salon on board with appointments made on request.

Your Comfort

The MS Hebridean Sky is equipped with the latest safety, navigation and communications equipment along with roll stabilisers to minimise the ship's motion. During your voyage we hope to offer you the opportunity to visit the Captain and Officers on the Bridge to check the vessel's progress by charts and learn more about your journey. On board you will also find a clinic and Doctor and a lift that serves all decks. When at anchor our nimble Zodiacs will ferry you ashore or, on select cruises, enjoy Zodiac cruises getting you closer to the natural world.

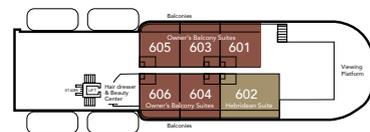
Your Life On Board

The atmosphere on board is warm and convivial and more akin to a private yacht or country hotel in which you can learn more about the wonderful destinations you are visiting in the company of like-minded people. There is a high ratio of crew to passengers and our friendly crew of 75 are mainly Filipino and Eastern European and our Captains are experienced mariners. After a day ashore you will return to the comfort and peace of a well-run and exceedingly comfortable ship where peace, high quality of service and attention to detail are the order of the day. A little music in the Lounge or bar after dinner, Guest Speakers and informative port briefings and of course good food, all contribute to make any voyage aboard this wonderful vessel a memorable and joyful experience.

MS HEBRIDEAN SKY DECK PLAN



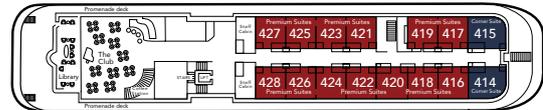
Shackleton Deck



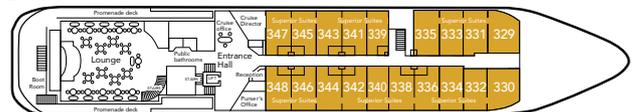
Scott Deck



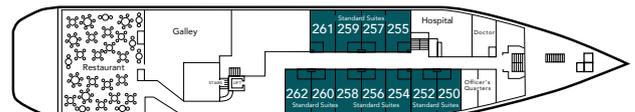
Mawson Deck



Byrd Deck



Amundsen Deck



- Standard Suites
- Corner Suites
- Owner's Balcony Suites
- Superior Suites
- Deluxe Balcony Suites
- Hebridean Suite
- Premium Suites

Please note that beds in each suite can be configured as double or twin with the exception of suites 601 and 602 which feature a fixed double bed.



During this voyage you will be visiting out of the way destinations and will be accompanied by an expedition team. Landings and excursions will be made by Zodiac landing craft. This cruise will appeal to the more adventurous and those who enjoy the natural world.



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