



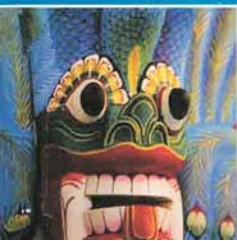
July & August 2007

Serendib

The Magazine of SriLankan Airlines. www.srilankan.aero



Aquatic Ballet **Celebrating the Year of the Dolphin**



Features:

Zen Rock Gardens
Nature's Apothecary
India's Wine Makers
Sri Lanka's Magic Masks



Destinations:

Surfing the Maldives
Bicycles Around the World
Truck Art of Pakistan
Europe's 'Regio' Currencies



Dolphin Watch

2007 has just been declared Year of the Dolphin, during which it is hoped the plight of these magnificent and intelligent creatures will be highlighted. David Bowden looks at some of the countries that run dolphin-watching trips.



In many parts of the world, dolphins breaching the water's surface is an everyday occurrence as these marine species go about their daily lives of pursuing and eating other marine creatures. There's nothing earth-shattering about this – dolphins have done it for eons and, with some concerted effort, hopefully will still do it from here to eternity.

What is interesting, though, is the fascination we humans place on the antics of these marine mammals. Dolphin and whale watching (both activities are often combined) is one of the fastest growing sectors of nature tourism. It is a US\$1 billion industry attracting some nine million participants annually in 87 countries.

But it is not only dolphins that are in our tourism sights, as watching nature in general is on the rise all over the world – wildebeest on the Serengeti Plains, Sumatran rhinos in the wilds of Borneo, leopards in the remotest parts of Sri Lanka's Yala National Park, and koalas in the pure and clean Flinders Chase National Park on South Australia's Kangaroo Island.

It seems that we all want to go wild in the wilds. Many tourists are obsessed with seeing wildlife while on holidays – for example, ticking off the big five (African buffalo, rhino, lion, leopard and elephant) while in Africa, or recording as many species as possible on a bird safari, in the world's great national parks.



“...we can make a difference to save these fascinating marine mammals from the brink of extinction.” H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco, The Patron of the Year of the Dolphin.



Waterways, seas, and oceans are also on the radar screens of nature lovers around the world. Call it wildlife spotting, nature holidays, or ecotourism, wildlife is hot and something most tourists want to encounter. While zoos are cool, many tourists are only lukewarm about visiting them as there isn't the exhilaration of seeing wildlife where it belongs – in the wild.

Operators have answered the call of the wilds and now there are all manner of tours available from brief encounters with native animals to five-star wildlife safaris.

Dolphin and whale watching programmes are available in many parts of the world, attracting tourists who want to observe the dolphins' playful antics or even jump into the water for a closer look. Forget *Flipper* and all those aquarium dolphin shows, seek out the real deal – seeing dolphins in the wild and even taking the opportunity to swim with them.

Here's a selection of some dolphin watch programmes around the region.

Southern Sri Lanka

On Sri Lanka's southern coast the small port of Mirissa is an ideal launching site for some first class whale and dolphin watching. In fact, it is so good that this stretch of coast seems destined to become a world-famous whale and dolphin hotspot. Remember, you read it here first! Mirissa Watersports can organize boat trips for up to 10 people (Tel: +94 773 597731, www.mirissawatersports.com). Spinner, Striped, Bottlenose, and Spotted Dolphins are all regulars, while larger whales are also frequently seen.

For excellent accommodation with a hill-top location try the Mirissa Hills (Tel: +94 91 228 6364, www.mirissahills.com). If you prefer a sea view, the Lighthouse Hotel at Galle is hard to beat (Tel: +94 91 222 4017, www.lighthousehotelandspa.com).

Farther up the coast, at Bentota, you can charter a small vessel for a five-hour excursion into the Indian Ocean. Eco Team can organise the trip in a small boat holding a maximum of four people. (Tel: +9411 553 3330, www.srilankaecotourism.com)

There's an excellent choice of larger hotels and private villas too. Stay at the Bentota Beach Hotel (www.bentotabeachhotel.com), a wonderful Geoffrey Bawa-designed resort, or the boutique Taprobana, a chic hideaway (www.taruvillas.com).

Lovina Beach, Northern Bali

The sight is exhilarating as 50 or so dolphins leap out of the water with the early morning sun rising from behind Bali's volcanic hinterland. Dolphin watching is a big family attraction and educational experience along Lovina Beach on this tropical resort island's less-explored northern coastline. It's a fantastic encounter, though hardly intimate, as the dolphins dart in front of the flotilla of small outboard motor-driven outriggers that set off at sunrise. Each morning a number of boats set off for an hour or so from the beach in pursuit of the playful dolphins.

Stay in the Sunari Villas and Spa Resort (Tel: +62362 41 775, www.sunari.com) which offers very comfortable beachside accommodation, pool, spa and a reasonable beach on which to play. The staff here will make all the necessary arrangements for a boat and crew to take you dolphin watching.



Nature - Dolphin Watching

© Peter Schlink - Fotolia.com



© Charlotte Phillips

© ianrnie van der Graaf - Fotolia.com

Get involved

What is the YoD campaign about?

The **Year of the Dolphin** campaign focuses on raising awareness of dolphins in the wild, the threats they face to their survival, and actions that could help their wild conservation. As the campaign is developed under the aegis of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, whose mandate is the conservation of migratory wildlife, the campaign does not address or deal with captivity issues.

On their website, there are regular updates, a Virtual Sea, dolphin quizzes, and even the opportunity to adopt one of the 130 Moray Firth dolphins that are found off the Scottish Coast. *Serendib* has adopted the 17-year-old 'Sundance', who is highly social but likes the occasional underwater fight!

For more information, visit the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society website at www.wdcs.org, or the Year of the Dolphin site at www.yod2007.org.



The World's Best Brands Available

DUTY FREE

Excellent selection of a wide range of household appliances & bicycles right here in Sri Lanka

WITH WARRANTY & COMPREHENSIVE AFTER SALES SERVICE

<p>Rekha Mixi-Blender-Croaker from India</p> 	<p>INDESIT Washing Machines, Gas/Electric Cookers, Cupboard Hobs & Hoods from Italy</p> 	<p>atlantic Electric Kettle, Health-Care from America</p> 
<p>PHUNGE Electric Rice Cooker Electric Casserole, Multi-Fryer & Ceiling Fans from India/Malaysia</p> 	<p>TOWER Electric Blender-Mixer & Juicer Electric Gas Cookers from Malaysia/India</p> 	<p>OPTIMA Blender, Food Chopper, Kettle, Sandwich Maker, Slice Toaster, Coffee Jug, Juicer, Grinder, Multi-Fryer, Bread Maker, Car System & Auto-Pressure Soil Filler, various Cookers from Australia</p> 

Discount Tag US\$ 5.00

Hunters
Trusted Quality Since 1977

HUNTER & COMPANY LTD.
DUTY FREE Shop No. 32A, Arrivals Lounge. Tel : 2251218.



Port Stephens, New South Wales, Australia

Dolphin watching has become a tourist magnet in many parts of Australia, including Port Stephens. Each morning the tour buses roll in from Sydney, 180km to the south, with tourists eager for a close encounter with nature. Pods of dolphins oblige almost as if they were paid to turn up and perform in front of the many vessels, which head off from Nelson Bay in search of these marine mammals. Nobody's disappointed as, within minutes, dolphins start skimming the surface. There's an agreed operating code between all the vessels to stay well clear of the dolphins so they can swim unhindered.

Operators like *Tamboi Queen* (Tel: +612 4981 2959, www.tamboiqueencruises.com) are among the more professional. For a bit of water fun, boom nets are lowered over the side for thrill seekers to enjoy a saltwater Jacuzzi.

Stay at the Anchorage (Tel: +612 49 84 2555, www.peppers.com.au) and appreciate superior facilities and services with the added bonus of dolphins swimming immediately off the marina resort.

Langkawi, Malaysia

Spotting dolphins in the wild in many cases is fortuitous – sometimes they appear and sometimes they don't. Perhaps it's the unexpected sightings that are the most rewarding. One such location is in the waters surrounding the 99 islands of Langkawi in the Andaman Sea off northwest peninsular Malaysia. Tourism activities in the natural environment of the islands are very popular, with the islands recently receiving UNESCO Geopark status in recognition of its 500 million-year-old rock formations.

The protective mangrove forests on the northern coastline of Langkawi's main island are a popular place to see the mangroves,

associated bird and animal life, limestone caves, as well as some picturesque landforms that formed the backdrop for the Hollywood movie *Anna and the King*.

While not common, there have been sightings of pods of up to 80 Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins. Langkawi is one of Malaysia's premier island attractions with many alluring qualities that will not disappoint sunseekers, dolphin watchers, and nature lovers.

Contact Asian Overland Services (Tel: +604 955 2002, www.asianoverland.com.my) who can arrange boats to visit the Langkawi wetlands and, with luck, some dolphins. Stay at the eco-friendly Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa (Tel: +604 952 0000, www.frangipanilangkawi.com).

Kaikoura, New Zealand

While crayfish are still harvested in the waters off the township of Kaikoura on the South Island's east coast, many of Kaikoura's fishing families spend their lives attending to the needs of dolphin and whale watchers who flock here especially during the warmer months from November to April. There are several operators with Dolphin Encounter (Tel: +643 319 6777, www.dolphin.co.nz) being the most experienced. They offer the year-round opportunity to see pods of between 100-800 dolphins and sperm whales swimming off the beach. This is one of the best places in the world to see dusky dolphins who are among the most acrobatic of all dolphins. Their spectacular leaps and trademark somersaults are what keep the tourists returning. Dolphin Encounter offers three trips per day in summer to see the dolphins, and provides equipment to enable swimming amongst the marine creatures.

Kaikoura is 180km north of Christchurch and on the Tranz Coastal rail link which affords spectacular views of the coastline and the backdrop of the Southern Alps. There are

many accommodation options in the tourist town but for those looking for unique and exclusive facilities, stay at Hapuku Lodge (Tel: +643 319 6559, www.hapukulodge.com) ten minutes north of town on the way to the Ohau Seal Colony.

The Republic of the Maldives

The scattered islands, reefs, and waters of the Maldives offer rich pickings for dolphins throughout the atolls. In fact, 22 species of whales and dolphins (about a quarter of the world's total) call the Maldives home. Among the dolphins, by far the most abundant – and the most acrobatic – is the Spinner Dolphin. With a dependable schedule, which sees large pods entering atoll channels in the mornings and leaving in the late afternoons, they make for great viewing on short trips. On longer ocean-based trips it is possible to spot a huge variety of cetaceans, including Common Bottlenose, Indo-Pacific Bottlenose, Risso's, Spotted, Striped, Fraser's, and Rough-toothed Dolphins.

Among the resorts offering short dolphin-watching excursions are Four Seasons Kuda Huraa (+960-664-4888, www.fourseasons.com) and Baros (Tel: +960-664-2672, www.baros.com). For 7- to 12-day cruises aboard a comfortable liveaboard vessel, contact marine biologist Dr. Charles Anderson, who, along with his wife, Susan, has lived in the Maldives since 1983 and is the foremost authority on cetaceans and fishes of the Maldives. (Tel: +960 3327024; Email: anderson@dhivehinet.net.mv.)

