

WIN! A MARES ABYSS 22 EXTREME REG WORTH £660

DIVE

WWW.DIVEMAGAZINE.CO.UK

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING SCUBA MAGAZINE
JULY 2010 £4.20



**THE IMPOSSIBLE
DREAM?**
WE DESIGN
THE PERFECT
DIVE CENTRE

**TIME FOR
A TIGER!**
VETERAN SHARK DIVERS
GO BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

DIVERS ON THE EDGE

EXPLORING CORNWALL'S DEEP WRECKS • MEETING THE
MONSTER OF MALPELO • BRAVING THE BARENTS SEA

**INDEPTH GUIDE
TO SEYCHELLES**

**HERE
COME THE
GIRLS!**
10 WOMEN'S
BCs TESTED

- ELPHINSTONE
- NEW DUI DRYSUIT
- UK MARINE PARKS



PLUS

- NEW DIVE SHOW
- SPORTS DIVER SKILLS
- MONTY IN IRELAND



9 771360 691092 07 >

CONTENTS

VOLUME 12 >> ISSUE TWO >> JULY 2010 >> WWW.DIVEMAGAZINE.CO.UK

FEATURES

- 23 WATER COLUMN**
Shark diving with the masters
- 40 ARCTIC SUMMER**
Andrey Nekrasv reports on the supercharged Barents Sea
- 47 IN THE ZONE**
Get involved in identifying new marine conservation zones
- 53 IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT DIVE CENTRE**
What makes the ideal diving setup? *DIVE* editor Simon Rogerson weighs up the options
- 59 THE MONSTER OF MALPELO**
Franco Banfi visits the home of a mysterious giant shark

WIN!



**20 MARES ABYSS
REGULATOR AND
OCTOPUS WORTH £660**

**35 NHeO DIVE COMPUTER
WORTH £550**

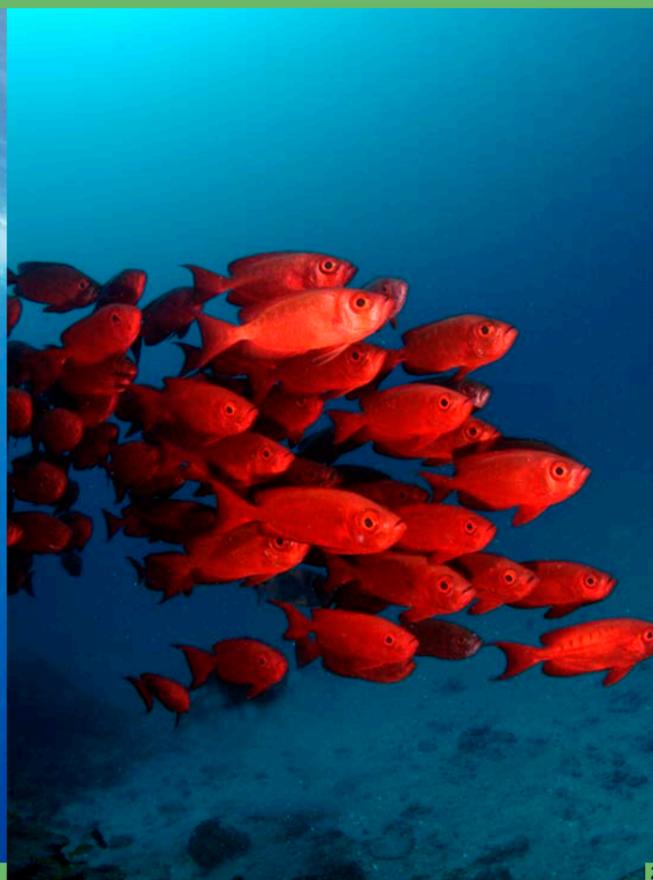
SEYCHELLES

Seychelles is an exclusive Indian Ocean destination, famed for its white-sand beaches and remote atolls. But how does it stand up to competition from the Maldives and Mauritius? **Tony Baskeyfield**, an experienced traveller in this part of the world, offers his island-hopping guide to Seychelles, its islands, dive sites and, of course, whale sharks >>



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY BASKEYFIELD

PERFECT FORM: a diver and stingray make for beautiful spectacle on Shark Bank in the Seychelles



WELL SPOTTED: whale sharks are regular visitors to the islands [1]; schooling bigeyes or *Priacanthus* [2]; the classic island fantasy made real – with waving palms and blue skies [3]; diving canyons at Desroches [4]; *Tubastrea* corals [5]

THE SEYCHELLES archipelago consists of 115 islands spread over 250,000 square miles in the Indian Ocean, four degrees south of the equator and 620 miles off the East African coast. If you're a diver, Seychelles offers a rich underwater environment combined with island beauty. You don't go to Seychelles to get a bargain. Compared with dive destinations such as the Maldives, it can seem expensive, but exclusivity has always been part of its appeal, and it has some of the most beautiful beaches on the planet. Of the 115 islands, 42 inner islands consist of granite boulders with sandy beaches, while the outer islands are sand cays and atolls. The islands immediately outside the capital, Mahé, offer the convenience of

proximity to the airport, and they are much more relaxed than Mahé itself. The islands of Praslin, La Digue and Silhouette, for instance, are just an hour's journey by fast boat. Here, the beaches are quieter and the pace of life is slower, and there's not much traffic because, in some cases, there aren't any roads. I think these islands offer a better experience than staying on Mahé; the people seem friendlier, and service in general is better. If you're coming for nightlife in Seychelles, think again, because there isn't any (with the exception of a few establishments on Mahé). I strongly advise booking fully inclusive deals that encompass your diving, hotel, meals and drink, as these extras can mount up if you're paying for them when there.

THE DIVING
Dive centres are usually based right on the beach. Typically, you'll walk out to the day boats with your gear, then go out for one or maybe two boat dives. Nearly all of the boats have some sort of canvas cover overhead to protect you from the sun. Underwater, the inner islands are characterised by big granite boulders covered with red sponges and soft and hard corals. Here, the Seychelles plateau rises from the ocean floor, so the diving is in the 20–30m range and is usually in calm waters with good visibility and great light. There are around 900 species of fish and 50 species of coral in Seychelles. Throughout the archipelago, the effects of coral bleaching are evident, although it has

to be said that there is recovery and new growth in most areas. The reefs are bustling with shoals of snapper, *Chromis* damselfish and fusiliers, with eagle rays and batfish cruising overhead. In the overhangs, glassfish dart around while grouper and lionfish are hunting. You can expect to see all kinds of rays, jacks, barracuda, grey reef sharks and turtles. Going further north to Denis Island or south to Desroches brings you to sumptuous white-coral cays and atolls with steep drop-offs and very clear water. In terms of wrecks, there are a few sunken barges around Mahé, but they're really just novice dives. However, there are two world-class wreck sites to visit: the Ennerdale and the Aldebaran.



MAHÉ

Accommodation: hotels, beach villas and apartments
Mahé is Seychelles' capital island and home to the capital city, Victoria. On Mahé, there are plenty of good dive centres, all equipped with knowledgeable instructors and well-maintained, modern hire kit. In addition to the usual hotel resorts, beach villas and apartments are also available.

ST ANNE ISLAND

Accommodation: hotel
St Anne Marine Park is a nesting site for green turtles. This area is not recommended for diving from June to October, as this side of the island is not sheltered from the southeast trade winds. The island is about two miles long by one mile wide, and is a 15-minute boat ride from Victoria.

PRASLIN

Accommodation: hotels, beach villas and apartments
Seychelles' second-largest inhabited island, Praslin, is seven miles long and is located about 45 miles northeast of Victoria. Most of Praslin's dive sites are fairly shallow, with few deeper than 20m. You can get there in one hour by fast boat (for about £72) or it's 20 minutes by plane (£160 return).

LA DIGUE

Accommodation: hotels, beach villas and apartments
Situated 31 miles from Mahé and 1.5 miles southeast of Praslin, La Digue is quieter and even more beautiful – in fact, there are only three roads. Grand Anse beach is one of the most beautiful coral sand beaches

anywhere. A fast boat from Praslin will get you there in about 30 minutes for £16.

SILHOUETTE

Accommodation: beach villas and apartments
You can see Silhouette from Beau Vallon Bay on Mahé. With its volcanic origins, it is the third-largest island in the Seychelles and casts a pyramid-shaped silhouette on the horizon. It's a 45-minute boat ride from Mahé.

DENIS ISLAND

Accommodation: beach villas and apartments
This unspoiled coral cay sits at the edge of the Seychelles Bank, where the Indian Ocean descends to 2,000m. The protected underwater world around Denis ranks as one of the richest in the area for diving. It's very isolated, so most people get there by plane or helicopter from Mahé, about about 60 miles to the south.

DESROCHES

Accommodation: beach villas and apartments
Of all the islands in the Amirantes Group, Desroches is the closest to Mahé and the only island in the group with accommodation. This coral island has nine miles of immaculate beaches that fringe a lush grove of coconut palms, interspersed by casuarina trees. The best diving is from March to November. Cold currents make the water surprisingly cool here in January – as low as 15°C. There are daily flights to and from Mahé, which take about 50 minutes to cover the 150-mile journey. >>>



NOT TO BE MISSED

1 ENNERDALE SHIPWRECK

Where: eight miles north-northeast of Mahé

Depth: 27m

The Ennerdale was a Royal Fleet auxiliary tanker that sank with no loss of life after striking an uncharted rock. It now lies broken into three sections and is a truly great wreck dive, swirling with fusiliers and snapper.

2 ALDEBARAN SHIPWRECK

Where: Willy's Bay, a mile off Mahé

Depth: 40m

The Aldebaran looks just like a sunken ship should do, with everything intact – masts included. This is the most beautiful wreck in the whole Seychelles and just gets better every year. Now festooned with all kinds of coral, its shoals of snapper, jacks and batfish circle in the clear blue water.

3 SHARK BANK

Where: five miles west off Beau Vallon, Mahé

Depth: 19–45m

There is a majesty about Shark Bank: huge boulders rise out of the sand, providing a home to a group of 2m-wide marble rays. They often hover on the current flowing over the rocks while masses of blue-lined snapper swirl in the inky blue water.

4 DENIS ISLAND

Where: 60 miles north of Mahé

Depth: 20–30m

Characterised by clear blue water, this site offers dives with turtles, shoals of barracuda, bigeyes and snapper. You may even be lucky enough to snorkel with manta rays in the shallow water after your dive. >>



TOP CONDITION: the intact wreck of the Aldebaran is swathed in marine life [above]; batfish on the Aldebaran [top left]; Seychelles is renowned for its pristine beaches such as this one on Denis Island [below]



5 DESROCHES

Where: 150 miles southwest of Mahé
Depth: 30–35m

The coral here has broken off to form cliffs, canyons and caves that drop off to a sandy bottom around 30m. All these sites offer an impressive variety of fish life. The visibility is better than at the inner islands, and there are sightings of orcas, spinner dolphins, and even sperm whales.

6 PRASLIN

Where: 27 miles northeast of Mahé
Depth: 15–20m

The island of Praslin is flatter than Mahé. Underwater, the granite rocks are also flatter, with characteristic grooves and gullies. The visibility is usually better here than Mahé and makes for fantastic scenic diving where clam-covered granite rocks rise out from a sandy plateau mixed in with a vibrant profusion of fish life.

7 SILHOUETTE

Where: 11 miles northwest of Mahé
Depth: 15–20m

Diving is very good all around Silhouette. Boats come over here from Mahé to dive (a 45-minute fast-boat crossing). The steep granite rocks, boulder-strewn bottom, swim-throughs and sand are features of diving around Silhouette, with glassfish hunted by lionfish in the shadows.

8 GRAND AND PETITE SOEUR

Where: four miles northeast of La Digue

Depth: 10–20m
This is one of the most beautiful night dives in all of Seychelles with sleeping parrotfish and banded cleaner shrimp awaiting customers. Under the granite rocks, there are many varieties of *Tubasteria*, with a thin covering of red and purple sponges.

9 CONCEPTION

Where: one mile southwest of Mahé
Depth: 10–20m

Conception typifies all that is best about Seychelles diving. All around this island are boulders and gullies that are home to grey and blacktip reef sharks. With this topography, it is possible for divers to duck down into a gap between the boulders or simply drift, sometimes with schools of mobula and eagle rays.



RAY DAY: mobula rays at Conception swarm over the sea bed [above]; a coral blenny peeks out of a hard coral [left]; a wall of corals and anthias [bottom left]

WHALE SHARK WONDER



In October, there is an upwelling of currents that brings plankton from deep water close to the surface over the Seychelles plateau, attracting whale sharks. If you want to see them, this is the time to take your trip.

It is possible to enjoy a chance encounter any time of the year in Seychelles, but the best bet is with the monitoring programme run by the Marine Conservation Society Seychelles in conjunction with the Underwater Centre. They use microlight aircraft to locate the whale sharks and guide the boats towards them. Then you can swim alongside marine biologists as they document the world's biggest fish. The programme is run under strict guidelines of how to swim with the whale sharks without stressing them, allowing no more than eight people at a time in the water.

Book it: a fully inclusive whale-shark trip costs £2,032 per person, including all flights, transfers, taxes and diving. For more details, see www.diveseychelles.com.sc. Available through Aquafirma (www.aqua-firma.co.uk).



NEED TO KNOW

GETTING THERE

Air Seychelles (www.airseychelles.com) has return flights from Heathrow to Mahé for £542. Hold luggage is 22kg, plus a further 20kg allowance for divers. Holders of current UK passports do not require visas. Vaccinations are recommended for polio and typhoid, and travellers should be aware of the rabies threat.

WHEN TO GO

Diving is possible all year round, but the best conditions around the inner islands are from March to October. The water temperature can reach 29°C and visibility is generally 15–30m. The southerly islands are close to the cyclone belt, so December and January are wet and sea conditions are rough.

CLIMATE

The climate of the islands is tropical and humid. It is cooler during the southeast monsoon between May and September. The northwest monsoon from March to May is warmer. The average temperatures are 24°C during the cooler period and 30°C in the warm period.

MONEY

Although the Seychelles rupee is the official currency, most businesses prefer to receive hard currency, with the euro being the most favoured. Credit cards are accepted at most restaurants and hotels and the ATM coverage is almost non-existent. The exchange rate is about £1 = 18 rupees. ■