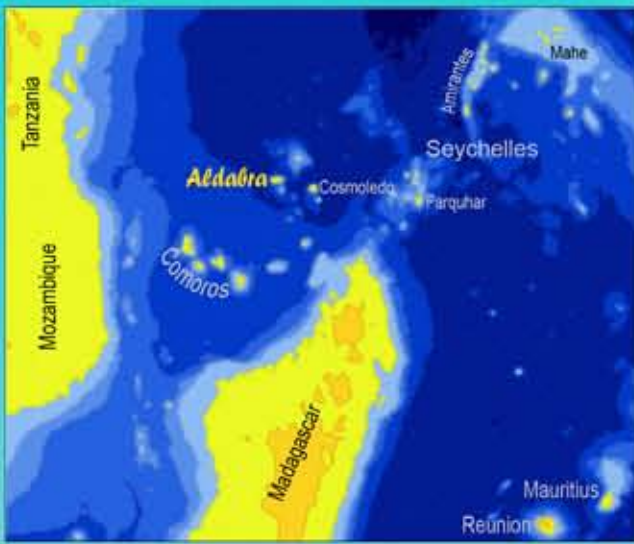


Aldabra: an untouched atoll



Marine wonders

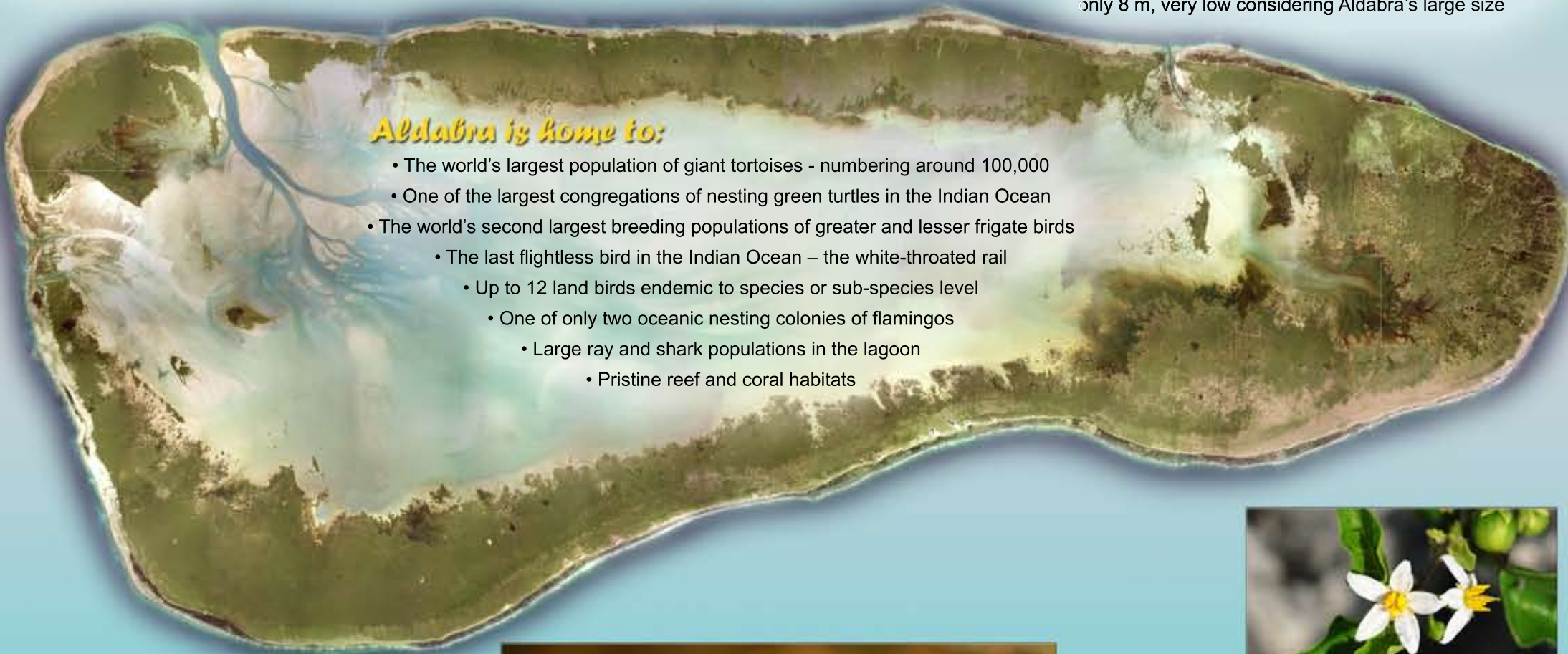
The Aldabra lagoon and reef are largely unspoiled and teeming with colourful and diverse life, providing the world with an idea of what a tropical sea can be like. The richness, variety and abundance of sea life is unique. Aldabra is a turtle mecca, with up to 2100 turtles laying eggs on the beaches annually. The lagoon is also home to hundreds of tropical fish species and, in recent years, the globally rare dugong (similar to manatees). The Aldabra coral reef is an important example of an undamaged marine ecosystem for the rest of the world.

The remote Aldabra atoll, one of the Seychelles southernmost islands, is approximately 1066 km south west of the main island of Mahé. The Aldabra group comprises a distinct and isolated group of coral islands. Aldabra itself is the world's largest raised coral atoll some 35 km long by 15 km wide. Its geographical isolation, rough terrain and scarcity of fresh water have deterred large human populations from settling. As a result, Aldabra is mostly pristine and is significantly less disturbed than other atolls worldwide. Aldabra stands as an outstanding example of a coral atoll and, in 1982, gained World Heritage Status from UNESCO. The atoll is a refuge for many endangered and unique species and is considered to be a biodiversity hotspot and one of the world's remaining natural wonders. Few people have ever been there, and even fewer have spent more than a couple of hours at this wild and beautiful atoll.



An inhospitable landscape

Aldabra's extraordinary terrain is rugged and extremely harsh. It consists mainly of fossilised coral reefs and mushroom shaped rocks called champignon, eroded to form a brittle and dangerously sharp rock. Pavé, a rough limestone, and platin, a flatter limestone, are also found on Aldabra and together they form a rough ring around the central lagoon. The average height above sea level is only 8 m, very low considering Aldabra's large size



Aldabra is home to:

- The world's largest population of giant tortoises - numbering around 100,000
- One of the largest congregations of nesting green turtles in the Indian Ocean
- The world's second largest breeding populations of greater and lesser frigate birds
 - The last flightless bird in the Indian Ocean – the white-throated rail
 - Up to 12 land birds endemic to species or sub-species level
 - One of only two oceanic nesting colonies of flamingos
 - Large ray and shark populations in the lagoon
 - Pristine reef and coral habitats

A Fascinating fauna

The dominant animal species on Aldabra is the giant tortoise, which with a population of some 100,000, is far more abundant here than anywhere else on Earth. The atoll has been colonised by breeding seabirds in their tens of thousands: greater and lesser frigate birds, boobies, five species of tern including the large caspian tern, tropicbirds, and even flamingos. The Aldabra rail, the last flightless rail in the Indian Ocean is also found only here. Other animals and birds found on Aldabra include colourful geckos, fruitbats, land birds, shorebirds, robber crabs and insects, many of which are endemic to the atoll.



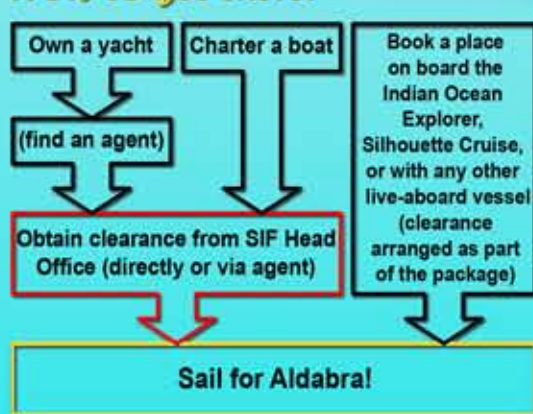
Plant life



The Aldabra flora originated mainly in Madagascar and is unusually rich and varied for an isolated atoll. Although dense Pemphis scrub covers large areas of the atoll and the lagoon is fringed with mangrove, the rest is covered by varied mixed scrub, with areas of grassland, scrubby wetland, coastal scrub and groves of taller shrubs and trees. Species endemic to Aldabra or Aldabra group include the Aldabra lily and several species within 'tortoise turf', favoured as grazing by giant tortoises.



How to get there:



For more information, please visit: www.sif.sc

Fees – as of August 2008

- Impact fee = €200 flat fee/person for cruise ship passengers (not crew) €100/day for all other visitors (including crew)
- Additional fee of €2500 applies to professional photographers & journalists
- All excursions (except diving) are included in these fees

Aldabra: what you need to know



Regulations:

- 1) All vessels must have clearance in writing from SIF head office and the Seychelles Port Authority before visiting Aldabra. Vessels approaching Aldabra must identify themselves and when within one kilometre of the shore will be answerable to the Warden of Aldabra. The warden will advise a suitable anchorage or mooring point within view of the research station. Vessels should use mooring buoys if these are available.
- 2) Upon anchoring, the vessel will be boarded by the warden who shall meet the captain and cruise director to plan and organise the visit on the atoll. Access to the lagoon and landing on any part of the atoll other than in designated tourism areas (see below) is prohibited.
- 3) Vessels cannot leave their anchorage unless cleared by the warden.
- 4) Fishing is not permitted within one kilometre from the shoreline. All boat operators should ensure that this restriction is conveyed to all their crew. Breaching of this regulation will have serious implications.
- 5) Tour operators should inform their boat drivers to drive slowly over the reef flat to limit disturbance to marine species. Support vessels are not permitted to speed unnecessarily, even when boats are empty.
- 6) All visitors to Aldabra (including ship's crew) must be accompanied by SIF staff at all times, except within the Station grounds or when there is not sufficient space for an SIF staff member to over-night aboard the vessel. Under these circumstances, over-night mooring will only be allowed in front of the Station and an SIF staff member will accompany the vessel on day-trips away from the station. Tour operator guides who are familiar with Aldabra and SIF policies, and have been vetted by SIF, may be allowed to lead small groups on permitted trails on Picard.
- 7) Visitors are only allowed to land on Picard and here must remain on designated trails or when in open areas, within the limits set by their guide.
- 8) It is prohibited to remove shells or pieces of coral from any area visited. No biological or geological specimen, alive or dead, may be collected by any visitor (including shells and fish). Standing on or handling coral or any other marine life is strictly prohibited. Walking on exposed sections of the lagoon is strictly forbidden.
- 9) Accidental introduction of alien species is a potential disaster in wilderness areas like Aldabra. Passengers and crew of cruise ships and charter boats are asked to assist in the prevention of this problem by always ensuring that they do not inadvertently carry any plant seed with them. Please wear clean trousers and socks, and ensure that shoes have clean treads before setting foot on land.
- 10) All expedition leaders must conduct a short course for their clients on low impact snorkelling before they enter Aldabra's coral reefs, marine and lagoon system.
- 11) Boats and zodiacs entering the lagoon to visit the frigate colonies must stay in close contact with the SIF lead boat. Zodiac drivers must at all times endeavour to keep outboard engine noise to a minimum when within the bird colonies. Mufflers should be used if possible. No-one is allowed to leave the boat.
- 12) It is prohibited to approach closer than 10 m to birds roosting or nesting.
- 13) Giant tortoises should not be stroked, patted or otherwise disturbed except at the research station where one or two individual tortoises are used to humans. It is strictly forbidden to sit on or ride any tortoise.
- 14) No wildlife is to be disturbed in any way. No animals are to be touched, chased, attracted with bait or followed around.
- 15) Visiting vessels must remove all rubbish.
- 16) Diving and snorkelling groups shall use only designated areas.
- 17) No helicopter operations permitted on Aldabra.
- 18) No motorised watersport activities are permitted

Activities on Aldabra:

- Picard Island is Aldabra's wildlife 'showcase', providing visitors with the best opportunities to view the atoll's unique fauna and flora. Picard is home to a large population of giant tortoises, endemic flightless Aldabra rails and other land birds, robber crabs, endemic plants and upside-down jellyfish. All of these species and Picard's striking geological features can be viewed during guided walks along well-maintained trails. Other attractions include the research station, the old settlement, the derelict cemetery and the impressive beach with abundant blacktip reef sharks along the shore.

- Lagoon cruise to frigate bird colonies
The main channel and Camp Frigate area are spectacular. All groups are accompanied by a ranger and remain in the boats during visits.

- Snorkelling on shallow reefs
The reef close to the research station offers excellent snorkelling opportunities to gain a glimpse into this pristine marine world. .

- Zodiac cruises
Boat cruises around the passes and channels offer stunning views of the lagoon and its wildlife.

- Scuba diving
Diving in and around Aldabra is superb and is allowed anywhere around the perimeter of the Atoll as well as in the main channel as a drift dive by prior arrangement. Please note that channel dives are dangerous and you must have qualified Divemasters or equivalent to assist and supervise the dives.

