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# nau**ique**

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## **JAKARTA'S THOUSAND ISLANDS**

Glistening gems on Jakarta's doorstep

## **QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL**

The legend is alive in Glastonbury

## **A CELEBRATION FOR MUMS AND DADS**

Fabulous feasts and sweet treats for each of their special days



Striped dolphin

# Whale Tales

By Abigail Alling

The long awaited moment came on 22 November 2012, when we departed Raffles Marina for Sri Lanka. Because of the paucity of data about marine life near the Andaman Islands, we chose a course for the "Ten Degree Channel". We figured we would probably see cetaceans in this region due to several steep underwater canyons that lay parallel to each other, running from east to west.

Deep drop-off areas usually go hand-in-hand with upwelling and large aggregations of zooplankton. These organisms are the basic food source for large marine creatures, including the great whales. As we approached the channel, we were delighted to spot striped dolphins, bottlenose dolphins and sperm whales just as the sun was setting!

On our arrival to Sri Lanka, we serendipitously met Captain Raja, a former fisherman who operates a successful whale-watching vessel named *Raja & the Whales* while collecting data about the cetaceans he observes with the hope of ensuring their long-term protection. The moment we arrived at the Mirissa Harbor dock I saw Raja waving to us and welcoming us with his booming voice of good will. All around me were people coming and going to see the whales with excitement in their eyes, and into the mix we had sailed *Mir*, now bobbing gently at anchor in the calm bay. What a perfect location for *Mir*, as well as for Biosphere Foundation, to join this community in support of marine mammal conservation!

Sri Lanka is home to as many as 28 species of marine mammals. An exceptional number... largely due to the deep drop-offs that surround the island, bringing an abundance of marine fauna and flora. A coveted land for centuries, it's called the "Jewel of the Indian Ocean" because of its wealth in biodiversity and gems. However, since the end

of the civil war in 2009, the country is now undergoing rapid development on land and at sea. This in turn impacts the marine environment resulting in coastal development, habitat loss, over-fishing and noise pollution.

Moreover, one of the busiest shipping lanes on the planet – in the top 0.2 percent – is located just 2 miles off the coast. This coincides with whale feeding, resulting in an unknown number of deaths caused by collision. All these factors (and others) have brought about a growing awareness that marine mammal populations might be severely threatened and/or endangered.

With the help of Swire Pacific Offshore and our other sponsors, we knowingly came to Sri Lanka to learn about cetacean distribution and abundance in order to understand the impact they were having on these local populations. However, there is nothing like being in the center of the action. Clearly, this was a complex situation drawing lots of attention. To make a difference, we needed a Sri Lankan partner with many willing helping hands to piece the puzzle together all year round.

Much to our joy, Captain Raja introduced us to the University of Ruhuna in Matara where we were welcomed by the smiling face of Dr Tilak Gamage, Dean of the Faculty of Fisheries & Marine Sciences and Technology. Quickly and easily, we drafted an MOU to develop a Marine Mammal Research and Education Programme at the University. This collaboration will help guide future policies on the protection of whales and dolphins as well as inspire the younger generation to become tomorrow's marine stewardship leaders.

**Please follow our progress at [www.biospherefoundation.org](http://www.biospherefoundation.org)**

Photo credits:  
Biosphere Foundation, Robert Thoren, 2012 (Striped dolphin)  
Biosphere Foundation, Abigail Alling, 2013 (Blue whale tail)



Raja boat in Mirissa



Blue whale tail