



## Whales



One of the most exciting water activities you can do in during your holiday is to see the whales. The best months are November to April but whales are in the Sri Lanka waters all year round.



Tour operators adhere to the International Code of Conduct for Whales and Dolphin Watching and conduct their tours in a responsible manner without trying to disturb these marine animals.



As part of Sri Lanka's commitment to eco-tourism, the Sri Lanka Coast Guards have increased their vigilance in monitoring the implementation of Sea Mammals Observation, Regulation and Control Regulations.

To ensure that the Regulations are adhered to by boat operators and tourists engaged in whale watching, the Coast Guard have been observing whale and dolphin watching activities. The coast guard also makes sure that the boat operators, crew and tourists abide by the safety precautions and regulations before and during their tour of observation.



Most tours are guided by experienced naturalists.

The crews follow the following rules:

- don't go too close to the whales (although they often come close to you)
- don't cross a whale's course (although they'll cross yours)
- reduce the speed to minimize the noise when approaching whales
- stop the engine if whales are coming close to the boat
- don't swim, snorkel or dive with the whales
- don't throw out any garbage into the ocean

There are ten species of whale in the Sri Lankan waters, some of whom are transient.

#### Blue Whale



The gigantic Blue Whale is the world's largest mammal. The blue whale is listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The blue whale can grow up to 98 ft long and weigh up to 173 tonnes. It is a blueish-grey colour with an underside of 'sulphur' giving it the nickname sulphur bottom.

#### Bryde's Whale



Bryde's Whale has a pleated throat and is named after Johan Bryde who established the first whaling station in South Africa in 1909. The Bryde's whale has three parallel ridges on the top of its head and between 40 and 70 throat pleats which allow its mouth to expand when feeding. They are moderately sized Baleen whales, a family including the Blue Whale.

#### Sperm Whale



The Sperm Whale is easily recognized for its massive head and prominent rounded forehead. It also has the largest brain of any living creature known. Its head holds a substance called spermaceti which early scientists believed were sperms but the actual function of the semi-liquid substance is yet unknown. It is the largest of the toothed whales and the largest toothed predator. It has between 18 to 26 teeth on each side of its lower jaw which fit into sockets in the upper jaw.

#### Humpback Whale



plankton and small fish.

The rarely seen Humpback Whale and spotting one in Sri Lankan waters is extremely rare. The Humpback whale is dark grey with some areas of white and has long pectoral fins and a knobbly head. It can reach 60 ft in length and adult females are typically larger than adult males. The Humpback whale typically lives for about 50 years and feeds on crustaceans such as krill,

#### Omura's Whale



schooling fish.

The Omura's whale has only recently been spotted in Sri Lankan waters. Also known as the dwarf fin whale, little is known of its behaviour the species having only being classified in the early 2000s. The Omura's whale was previously thought to be a pygmy version of the Bryde's whale. Omura's whales typically move in pairs or as solitary individuals and feed on krill and

## Killer Whale



Killer whales have a diverse diet, although individual populations often specialize in particular types of prey. Some feed exclusively on fish, while others hunt marine mammals such as seals and other dolphins. They have been known to attack baleen whale calves and even adult whales. Killer whales are apex predators as no animal preys on them. They can be found in each of the world's oceans in a variety of marine environments.

Killer whales are highly social and some populations are composed of matrilineal family pods which are the most stable of any animal species. Their sophisticated hunting techniques and vocal behaviours, which are often specific to a particular group and passed across generations, have been described as manifestations of animal culture.

## Whale Shark



The whale shark is a slow-moving, filter-feeding carpet shark and the largest known fish species still in existence. Whale sharks have very large mouths and are filter feeders, which is a feeding mode that occurs in only two other sharks, the megamouth shark and the basking shark. They feed almost exclusively on plankton and small fishes and pose no threat to humans. The

name whale shark refers to the fish's size being as large as some species of whales and also to its being a filter feeder.

## Short Finned Pilot Whale



The Short Finned Pilot Whale has flippers are shorter than those of the long-finned pilot whale with a gentler curve on the edge. They have fewer teeth than the long finned pilot whale with 14 to 18 on each jaw. Short finned pilot whales are black or dark grey with a grey or white cape. They have grey or almost white patches on their bellies and throats and a grey or white stripe which goes diagonally upwards from behind each eye. Their heads are

bulbous and this can become more defined in older males. Their dorsal fins vary in shape depending on how old the whale is and whether it is male or female. They have flukes with sharply pointed tips, a distinct notch in the middle and concave edges. They tend to be quite slender when they are young becoming more stocky as they get older.

## Pygmy Sperm Whale



The pygmy sperm whale is not much larger than many dolphins. They are about 1.2 m (3 ft 11 in) at birth, growing to about 3.5 m (11 ft) at maturity. Adults weigh about 400 kg (880 lb). The underside is a creamy, occasionally pinkish colour and the back and sides are a bluish grey. However, considerable intermixing occurs between the two colours. The shark-like head is large in comparison to body size, given an almost swollen

appearance when viewed from the side. A whitish marking, often described as a false gill, is seen behind each eye. The lower jaw is very small and slung low. The blowhole is displaced slightly to the left when viewed from above facing forward. The dorsal fin is very small and hooked and its size is considerably smaller than that of the dwarf sperm whale.

## Pygmy Killer Whale



The Pygmy Killer Whale is a poorly known and rarely seen oceanic dolphin. It derives its common name from sharing some physical characteristics with the killer whale. This whale is dark grey to black on the cape and has a sharp change to lighter grey on the sides. The flesh around their lips and on the end of their snout is white while pinkish white skin surrounds the genitals. The average length is just over two meters (6.5 ft.) They are not acrobatic animals

but some spy-hopping, breaching, and other active behaviours have been recorded. These dolphins move in groups, usually of 10 to 30, but occasionally much larger. They travel approximately 3 km/hour (2 miles/hour) and are predominately found in deeper waters ranging from 500 m to 2000 m (1600–6500 ft.) in depth. Their diet consists of squid, octopus, molluscs and small fish. They have been observed attacking, killing, and eating other cetacean species such as the common dolphin.

