

## **Yucatan, Mexico August 11 - 16, 2013**

Snorkel with Wondrous Whale Sharks and Explore Sacred Mayan Sites!

**Holbox Island** is one of the best hidden Caribbean treasures. Located in the northern part of the Yucatan Peninsula, this paradise is the crossroads between the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico and is rich in ancient Maya history. Located to the northwest of Cancun, Isla Holbox is just 26 miles long and an easy 20 minute ferry ride takes you there. Holbox is separated from the mainland by the shallow Yalahau lagoon which gives sanctuary to thousands of flamingos, pelicans and other exotic birds and creatures.

Most of the locals make their living fishing and a common sight is seeing the fishermen walking through the village with their catch of the day or carrying their nets. The streets of the island are white sand, common in the Caribbean and golf carts are the main transportation. Despite its natural beauty and tranquil atmosphere, Holbox is considered a virgin tourist destination. Most tourists flock to the large resort hotels of Cancun so this has left the island virtually unspoiled by mass tourism.

But what sets Isla Holbox apart from anyplace else are the wondrous creatures that visit the area every summer, the HUGE and gentle whale sharks. The whale shark has nothing in common with whales except for its size and the fact that it only eats small plankton by scooping it up with an open mouth. Its body is similar to a shark but the whale shark is actually the largest fish on earth, usually measuring between 15 and 50 feet in length and weighing as much as 10 tons. These gentle sea creatures spend the months from June through September feeding in the plankton rich waters around Isla Holbox.

The whale shark is a very gentle and docile creature and despite their impressive appearance, are slow moving and pose no threat to humans. Being in the presence of these incredible creatures, with enough time to observe and enjoy them, is a special privilege indeed. When in the water with them we respect their space and never touch or harass them in any way!

Tourism based on whale shark activity has increased dramatically in the last few years and government agencies have taken steps to protect these magnificent animals so that the species will not be harmed and so they will continue to return to this area. There are strict rules against scuba equipment being used to view them so it is snorkel only. Local guides have been trained to give tours that are as safe for the whale sharks as they are for their human visitors. Aware of the importance of this species and its protection, President Felipe Calderon has decreed a marine reserve of 160,000 hectares added to the reserve of Yum Balam

### **Daily Itinerary**

#### **Day 1. August 11, 2013 Arrival in Cancun, Mexico – HolBox Island**

Welcome to the Yucatan! Upon arrival at the Cancun airport arrangements will be made to transfer you to the Puerto Cancun dock where you will take the ferry to Holbox Island. Upon arrival you will be transferred to the 4 Star Villas Paraiso del Mar beach resort. Enjoy the remainder of the day exploring the island or enjoying the pool, beach and other amenities of this lovely hotel.

Villas Paraiso del Mar is an ecological hotel where great care has been taken in all environmental aspects of its construction, running and management. Discover a new kind of eco-tourism accommodations immersed in nature. Surrounded by green areas and tropical plants, you will enjoy peaceful tranquility, comfort and quality in a relaxing and exclusive atmosphere. Daily buffet breakfast included [Villas Paraiso del Mar](#)

## **Day 2. August 12. "VIP" Private Charter Boat Whale Shark Adventure B**

Our Whale Shark adventure will begin at 7:00AM when you attend the morning coffee briefing. All snorkel and safety equipment is provided as well as on-boat snacks, sandwiches, ice cold sodas and water. Our luxurious high speed Lancha boat has sun covers, and thick soft cushions to sit on for a smooth, comfortable ride to and from the whale shark swim areas which can take from 1 to 1 1/2 hours depending on where the whale sharks are feeding. You'll also receive an early morning snack of freshly-made Empanadas and yogurt drinks enroute. We'll also have sandwiches, snacks and water on board for our day on the water.

The highlight of our VIP private charter is you'll get unlimited time with the magnificent Whale Sharks! You are only allowed 2 people at a time in the water with a licensed biologist / guide, but you'll enjoy 5-6 extended duration swims as compared to 3 short swims on a public boat. This will allow us the ultimate in-water experience with these wondrous creatures! You may also encounter dolphins, huge manta rays, golden rays, turtles and flamingos - every day in Mother Nature's aquarium is different!

After we leave the whale sharks, our Captain will head for a spot where he knows Fresh Snapper, Grouper, & Yellowtail are in abundance. The crew and you if you choose, fish for these tasty morsels "Island Style" w/ Hand lines. Then we're off to the northern most point on the Yucatan peninsula where we can explore a lighthouse, snorkel some reefs with colorful fish while the crew prepares the "FRESHEST" CEVICHE Imaginable! They filet and marinate our "fresh catch" in fresh Squeezed Lime Juice & Salt, then mix with Chopped Tomatoes, Onions, Cilantro, and a Hint of "Habanero Peppers" (peppers optional). This is then served in a huge Bowl with Crispy Tortilla Chips!

We'll return to the island in the afternoon where you can relax and enjoy the remainder of the day at the hotel pool or beach. You may choose an optional activity like a horseback ride on the beach, kayaking, or exploring the island in a golf cart.

Later enjoy a spectacular sunset as you enjoy a cool drink and then savor a FRESH LOBSTER PIZZA at Edelyns Restaurant. Get good night's rest so you are ready for the next day's adventure!

## **Day 3. August 13. Full day excursion to the Mayan Site of Ek Balam. B,L**

After breakfast we'll take the ferry back to the mainland to visit Ek Balam. Ek Balam which means "Bright Star Jaguar" in Maya language is one of the most fascinating Mayan sites in the area. Not only does it boast some of the most monumental Mayan buildings on the Yucatan peninsula, it also features a wall of stucco unique in the Maya world, you just have to see to believe it! Ek Balam is unlike any other Mayan site and has a feel all its own. The main temple here is impressive, both in size and architecture. Its massive size of over 500 feet long and 200 feet wide easily makes it one of the largest structures ever excavated in the Yucatan. The intricate detail of the artistry and symbolism incorporated into the frescoes and sculptures decorating this temple are an artistic marvel.

Ek Balam's most striking temple is one with a huge "monster mouth". To the Maya this represents a portal to the "other world". The enormous mouth of the Witz Monster (entry to the underworld), complete with teeth, is awe-inspiring. As Ek Balam is still an undiscovered treasure that not many tourists visit, you can still climb the steps up to the top of the temples for an amazing view of the entire area. As we are driving to Ek Balam we will pass many small indigenous villages and we'll stop to meet some of the local people, shop for hand-made crafts and learn more about the culture.

## **Day 4. August 14. Our 2nd "VIP" Private Charter Whale Shark Adventure B**

Another day out on the water with our new friends the gentle and docile Whale Sharks. This day will be as exciting as

our first experience with them and who knows what other surprises this day might bring! Sandwiches, snacks and water on the boat.

**Day 5. August 15. Free Day to relax or enjoy optional island activities. B**

After so much excitement with the whale sharks, today is your day to do as you please. Hang out at the pool, kick back and relax, rent golf carts to explore the island, do some local shopping in Holbox village, ride horses or go kayaking. You can also choose to go on another mainland tour to the Mayan sites of Chitzen Itza, Coba or Tulum. There are also boat tours to other areas in the marine reserve for bird-watching or you can swim with the whale sharks one last time and go on a public boat tour.

**Day 6. August 16. Departure Holbox Island to Cancun Airport B**

You will be transferred from the island to the airport, transfer times will be arranged according to flight departure times. This is the end of our group trip experience but you may also choose to extend your stay in the Yucatan with a few more days on the island or a couple of days in Cancun.

**Holbox Island Whalesharks trip cost:**

August 11 - 16, 2013

\$1,769.00 per person

based on a group of 8 in double accommodations

Single Room Supplement: \$390.00

**INCLUDES:**

5 nights at the 4\* Paraiso del Mar Villa Resort

buffet breakfast daily at the resort

2 days VIP Whale shark swims private charter boat / snorkel gear is provided

Professional photographer / videographer with us on the boat / video and still photos are included

(sandwiches, snacks, and water provided on the boat)

Full day private tour to Ek Balam, Mayan Site on the mainland

stops at local villages, lunch included

**NOT INCLUDED:**

airfare to Cancun, Mexico

meals not noted in the itinerary

transfer from Cancun to Holbox Island, this will be arranged for you and price determined by number of people in the van.

It's a 2 hr. ride from the airport to the ferry, 20 min. ferry ride to the island.

Average cost around \$55 per person for 4 people, more than 4 price goes down

optional island activities / gratuity to boat crew