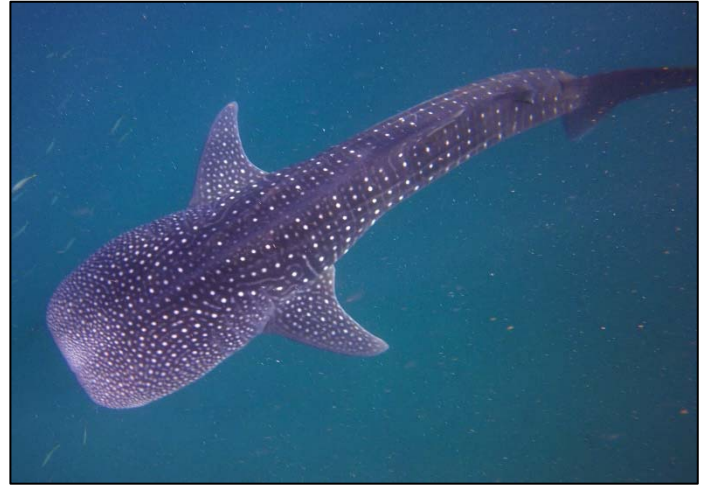


WHALE SHARKS OF THE GULF OF TADJOURA
WITH
THE SHARK RESEARCH INSTITUTE
December 3rd – 11th, 2021



TRIP DETAILS

Whale shark research in Djibouti: I've worked with whale sharks in Djibouti since 2012, and now direct the research there in collaboration with Djibouti Whale Shark Project and Sundive Research. The Djibouti whale shark aggregation is unique and fascinating. While some people hope to see the largest of the largest sharks, Djibouti whale sharks are the smallest found at any feeding aggregation. Whale sharks in the Gulf of Tadjoura average 3-5 meters in size, with animals as small as 2 meters sometimes seen. Reproduction in whale sharks is a mystery, and where they spend their first few years is unknown. When young sharks do appear, it is in only a few places in the world and one of them is Djibouti. This site provides an opportunity to study how and why these youngest sharks aggregate there, their behaviors while in the Gulf, and where they go when they leave. We are documenting feeding patterns, analyzing plankton composition, taking spot pattern photos for long-term tracking of individual sharks, and applying satellite tags to closely follow the animals' movements inside and outside the Gulf.



Life on the Gulf: The Gulf of Tadjoura area is starkly beautiful, and undiscovered to the point that we see few other ships. We do three skiff outings most days - a short trip for whale sharks before breakfast, then trips in the later morning and afternoon for both diving and whale sharks. There is no diving with the sharks, by international agreement for whale shark ecotourism, so all whale sharking is snorkel only. Our main activity is studying the sharks, and participants are encouraged to function as research assistants – taking ID photos of animals you encounter, and helping with plankton studies and other activities. There is plenty of time for diving as well, and we



have a divemaster on board who will select sites each day. The reefs in the Gulf of Tadjoura are healthy, with abundant fish and turtles, and even a spot known for guitarfish. There is also excellent snorkeling from the ship at several of our anchorages...it is not at all necessary to dive to participate in or enjoy the trip. After dinner people relax, have a cocktail, share photos, and I give lectures on whale sharks. The water in the area can be quite clear, so lovely photos are possible, and the young sharks are very photogenic. At night we hang a light off the ship to collect plankton, and sometimes whale sharks come to feed right at the ship. It's magical to see them appear from the dark, circling in and out of the beam of light.

Our floating home: The Deli is a charming ship that accommodates 12 guests in shared cabins with individual baths. It is an older ship, however, and not luxurious as some dive boats are. There is no AC (the weather is not hot), the cabins have bunks, and the shower is only warm. I am not trying to be discouraging, I absolutely love this trip, but do want people to realize it is a research trip. The cabins are all double occupancy, so if you come by yourself we will pair you with a roommate. The weather is perfect for sleeping on deck, and many of us bring a light sleeping bag to sleep up top. Our chef makes an excellent combination of French and local dishes. I am vegetarian and am fairly well-accommodated on the trip, though I do eat eggs and some fish. Please let me know of any dietary restrictions you have so I can be sure they can be met. The chef is always willing to be creative when I've made suggestions.

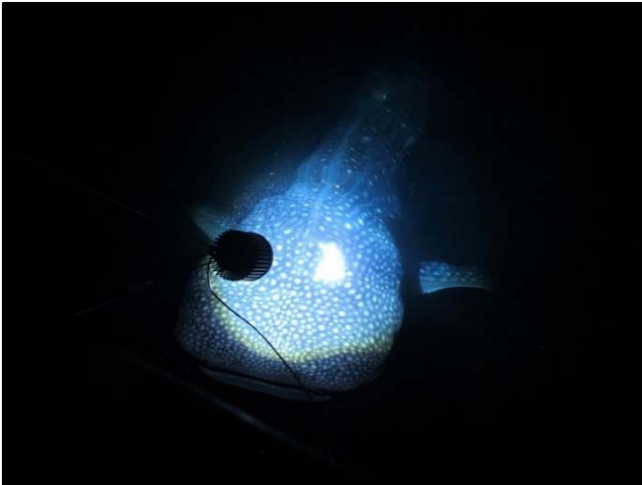


Flights: Our trip package includes one night before and one night after the ship at the Sheraton Djibouti. You should plan to arrive in Djibouti on December 3rd (the very early morning of the 4th is also possible), and depart on December 11th or after. (Late December 10th departures can sometimes be accommodated.) Several airlines fly into Djibouti, including Qatar Airways through Doha, Ethiopian Airlines through Addis, Turkish Airlines through Istanbul and Air France through Paris. We will work with you however you choose to fly, **but do not book your flights before clearing them with me**, so I can be certain they are compatible with our schedule. We will meet you at the airport and get you through the airport visa process and to the hotel, or directly to the ship depending on your arrival time.

Price and schedule: The trip price of \$2400 per person double occupancy includes the nights of December 3rd and December 10th at the Sheraton Djibouti, transfers between the airport, the hotel and the ship, 6 nights on board the ship with all meals, all diving and shark excursions and a tax-deductible donation to the Shark Research Institute. Not included are airfare to Djibouti City, Djibouti visa (cost varies by government whim between \$25 and \$75 USD), and soda and beer on the ship. Saturday morning December 4th we will leave port about 9am, with a 3-hour ride to our first anchor in the Gulf of Tadjoura. We will have lunch and be out with the sharks by afternoon! We arrive back in port early afternoon on Friday December 10th, and transfer to the Sheraton. You have your hotel room overnight or for as long as you need it until your departure. Many international flights leaving Djibouti depart in the late night or early morning hours, and we will take you to the airport for your flight.

The city and beyond: When we arrive back in the city on Friday we will take a walk around the market for sightseeing and shopping, followed by a group dinner. If you decide to stay longer there are many excursions available. I will organize a Saturday December 11th trip to Lac Assal, a vast salt lake west of the city. During the drive you will see the volcanic rift valley, and the adventurous can wade into the hypersaline lake. There are longer trips to sites outside the city; I have explored several areas of the country, and can make recommendations for guides for hiking, kayaking, birding. If you choose to stay in the city we can arrange additional hotel nights at the group rate.

Security: The Horn of Africa has its security issues, and safety is a concern of many people traveling to the region. The piracy situation was quite active when I first went to Djibouti in 2012, and has ebbed and flowed since then. In general things have been fairly quiet since the US and other countries began to patrol the Gulf of Aden. It is admittedly a potentially volatile part of the world, yet I have never felt threatened or uncomfortable there. We are anchored well into the Gulf of Tadjoura, and even at the height of piracy there were no incidents in Tadjoura. There is no cargo traffic there and nothing to steal. Djibouti has an extensive military presence, and the Gulf is heavily patrolled from the air. We frequently see helicopters overhead from the US and French armies. They are used to looking for our ship, so that is an extra measure of security. I am a cautious but not fearful traveler, and have been to a number of “dangerous” countries. I am not nervous about going to Djibouti, but everyone must gauge their own comfort level. We suggest that people purchase trip insurance, there are packages that let you cancel for any reason, in case something occurs that makes you decide not to go.



BOOKING

If you decide to join the trip we require a \$500 deposit at the time of booking. The deposit can be made through Paypal, or by check in USD through snail mail. Paypal charges a fee for collecting payments, so we must add an additional \$50 per person surcharge for online payment. Contact trip leader Dr. Jennifer Schmidt (jennifer@sharks.org) for payment instructions once you have decided to reserve a space.

STUFF THE LAWYERS MAKE ME SAY

Wild animal disclaimer: We cannot guarantee that you will see whale sharks. I have never gone to Djibouti and not seen sharks, but several years ago there was one week in which no sharks were seen. I was there a few weeks later and we had

sharks again. Those of you who have been to the Cancun aggregation with me will see how different Djibouti is. There are fewer sharks, we may see half a dozen on a given day, and maybe 20-30 individuals for the week. You will see them ALONE though, and over longer periods of time, with just our few people in the water and the sharks unafraid and curious in the way of animals under little tourist pressure.

Cancellation policy: Expedition deposits and final payments are non-refundable once paid, should you choose to, or be forced to, cancel your participation in a trip. For all expeditions SRI must pay in advance for boat charters, hotel reservations, transportation, guide fees, dive equipment, etc. With rare exception, these charges are nonrefundable to us should someone decide not to join the expedition. If we are able to resell your spot, we will refund the amount of your payment recovered. (Spots resold at a late date may be at a discounted price.) Should an expedition be cancelled entirely, for reasons such as weather or political strife or other unavoidable events, participants will be refunded in full with the exception of any monies SRI cannot recover. We strongly recommend that all expedition participants purchase full travel insurance to protect their investment.

For more information or to reserve a space contact trip leader Dr. Jennifer Schmidt at jennifer@sharks.org.