



Witness one of the World's Most Spectacular Migrations with Lisa Preston

RELATED EXPERIENCES:

Red Crab Spawning Christmas Island
8 DAYS/7 NIGHTS (SHARED)



When Christmas Island is mentioned, most people first think of the Red Crabs. It's estimated that there could be close to 120 million crabs on the island (many more than the previous estimate of 50 million) and, from afar, it can look like the island is covered in a red carpet during their annual migration.

In the months of November and December, the crabs flock from their forest homes to the coast for the mating season, the pitter patter of fast-moving feet a constant background noise. Christmas Island National Park staff have to close roads and erect temporary barriers that stretch for kilometres to protect the critters.

Lisa Preston, manager of Indian Ocean Experiences, says it's no surprise that tourism peaks during this time. "Our Red Crabs are endemic and they are truly amazing. Over millions of years spent on the island, the crabs have adapted the forest to suit their needs. There is minimal low-lying shrubbery now because the crabs like the forest floor clean, so they can easily move around."

In Lisa's opinion, the most remarkable crab experience occurs when mass spawning is successful. "Spawning usually happens about four to five weeks after migration, and if the conditions are ideal baby crabs

return from the sea in droves, but it can vary radically from year to year," Lisa explains. "I remember in 2016, on Christmas morning, it was just phenomenal."

"Our Red Crabs are endemic and they are truly amazing. Over millions of years spent on the island, the crabs have adapted the forest to suit their needs."

The babies arrived a month earlier than expected and we were not able to offer our guests the usual buffet breakfast because we were sitting on an ankle-deep carpet of red," she laughs. "Of course, there were no complaints and the guests were awe-struck." Lisa stresses that baby crab returns are hard to plan for from a tourism perspective.

"We have an estimated spawning time, but the babies can be a week early or late, or they may not come at all," she explains. "However, the adults definitely go through migration every year and it's just a phenomenal experience all round."

CONTACT INFORMATION:

info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475

Researching Christmas Island's Endemic Birds with Mark Holdsworth

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Bird & Nature Week Christmas Island

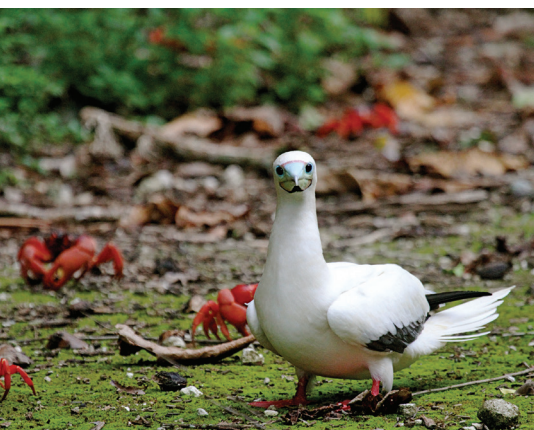
8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS (SHARED)

Christmas Island Birdwatching

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS (SHARED)

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Work alongside scientists banding birds, collecting data on various endemic species and participating in nightly presentations about restoring the ecology of the island.



According to Mark Holdsworth, Indian Ocean Experiences' bird expert, one of the best times to experience Christmas Island's birds is during Bird 'n' Nature Week. "May to November is our dry period here, and this year Bird 'n' Nature week falls between 30 August and 6 September," Mark says.

"The birds are about, and the time is optimal as it coincides when researchers, including me, visit the island. Guests can assist us with capturing, measuring and placing bands on the birds before we release them. It's a great opportunity for close encounters with some of the island's special birds."

Although the island is home to only a handful of endemic birds, Mark explains that the bird-watching experience is unforgettable. "Christmas Island sits atop of an ancient volcanic seamount surrounded by a vast ocean. And, because there is no easy way to land on the island, the wildlife has either flown or washed up here over millennia," Mark explains. "We don't have many bird species on the island because of its location, but what we do have is unique."

Mark likens the Christmas Island nature experience to Galapagos, with ample opportunities for guests to get close to the birds. "There was no human occupation on the island until Europeans created a settlement

in 1888 to exploit phosphate, so the wildlife had not evolved to fear people. The birds are approachable, especially the critically endangered Christmas Island Goshawk, which I have spent many years studying," he says. "We are able to get within a metre of these birds, and this provides great opportunities for both research and bird-watching."

To seal the deal, Mark and the team ensure that guests are split into small groups during Bird 'n' Nature Week, with each group assigned their own researcher for the day. "The beauty of doing it this way is that we are able to work around the island and show guests all of the island's birds, including Goshawks, Abbott's, Brown and Red-footed Boobies, and White-tailed (including the unique golden form) and Red-tailed Tropicbirds," Mark says. "Each group has their own dynamics, and I can't think of any other bird-watching experience that offers such a personal and direct connection."

"Each group has their own dynamics, and I can't think of any other bird-watching experience that offers such a personal and direct connection."

CONTACT INFORMATION:

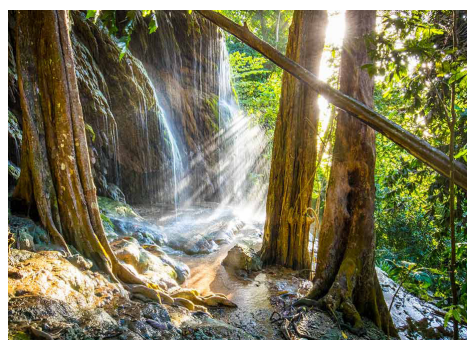
info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475

Learning about the Geological Wonders of Christmas Island with Lisa Preston

RELATED EXPERIENCES:

Christmas Island Ultimate Wildlife
8 DAYS/7 NIGHTS (SHARED)

Christmas Island Birdwatching
8 DAYS/7 NIGHTS (SHARED)



Christmas Island has never been linked to a landmass. Essentially, this patch of paradise is an extinct old volcano with a coral cap sticking out of the ocean. "It's pretty amazing when you think about it," says Lisa Preston, manager of Indian Ocean Experiences. "The island as it is today has taken tens millions of years to form, and now we have this geological wonder."

Unsurprisingly, the island is full of marvels of nature. The coastline – which stretches for 73 kilometres (45 miles) – is made up of serrated

The Grotto is another favourite site to see, and it is easily accessible and popular with both visitors and residents alike. "I include a visit to the Grotto on the Orientation Tour," Lisa says. "The half-fresh, half-salt crystalline water sitting between craggy limestone rocks tempts swimmers, and this is often where guests might see crabs for the first time."

For active explorers after an off-the-beaten track adventure, Lisa will veer off course with a visit to Anderson Dale. "You have to scramble down a cliff face and it can often

"The island as it is today has taken tens millions of years to form, and now we have this geological wonder."

cliffs broken up by the occasional shallow bay or beach. There are intricate cave systems underground and underwater. And the island's blowholes render any sightseer speechless. "I take guests there as part of the Nature Tour, and we time our visit to when the tide is up," explains Lisa. "As the waves crash on the cliffs colossal blasts of water soar skywards. It's incredible."

be slippery, so I can only take fit people with good agility, but it's worth it for those who take the trip.

When you get to the bottom there's a spectacular limestone cliff gorge that looks a little like a church, a natural infinity pool with the ocean washing in, birds soaring above, and crabs scrambling below. It's ethereal."



CONTACT INFORMATION:

info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475

Saving the Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko with Brendan Tiernan

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

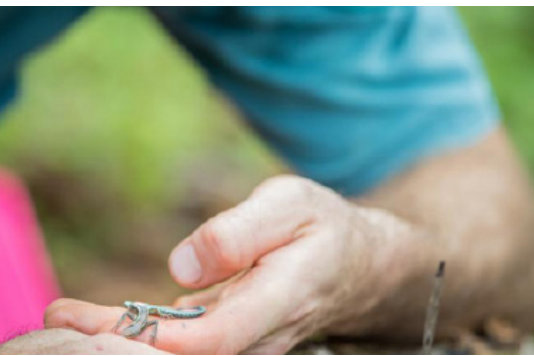
Christmas Island Citizen Science Week

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS (SHARED)



CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Contribute to a reptile census and hands-on conservation activities for the endemic Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko.



Brendan Tiernan, the Christmas Island National Park Natural Resources Manager, has been living on Christmas Island for close to 15 years. "I moved here to work on the Yellow Crazy Ant program, and from there I was fortunate to move into the conservation of wild reptiles. Since 2009 we have been trying to prevent the extinction of the Blue-tailed Skink, Lister's Gecko and the Forest Skink," says Brendan. "Unfortunately, our efforts failed to capture enough Forest Skinks to establish a breeding population, but our efforts are ongoing for the Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko."

Brendan explains that between 2009 and 2010, the National Parks team recovered 66 Blue-tailed Skinks and 43 Lister's Geckos from the wild in a move to increase populations. "The reptiles on Christmas Island evolved without the presence of predators," explains Brendan. "And we suspect that the introduction of the South-East Asian Wolf snake caused the population decline."

Guests visiting the island have historically been able to participate in research efforts through Citizen Science weeks organised by the National Park, the Christmas Island Tourism Association and Indian Ocean Experiences. Although Covid-19 put a halt to the various programs in place, the Indian Ocean Experiences team are hopeful that guests will soon again be able to contribute to the critically important work.

"In the past visitors had the opportunity to participate in our reptile census in February and August. The hands-on program offered people the chance to interact with the animals while learning about the science," Brendan says. "And of course, we chat about the various programs we have in place, such as the Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko population revival."

To date, the Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko numbers are increasing. In 2016, the population outgrew the National Parks team ability to care for them in captivity, and soft releases into enclosures were introduced with short-term success. In 2019 and 2020, 600 Blue-tailed Skinks were translocated to two islands on the Cocos Keeling archipelago where no predators exist.

Lisa Preston, manager of Indian Ocean Experiences, suggests that those interested in seeing the released skinks book the High Tide Canoe Safari on Cocos Islands. "Guests can view the skinks there and participate in a population count," she says. "It's a really special experience."

"The hands-on program offered people the chance to interact with the animals while learning about the science."

CONTACT INFORMATION:

info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475

Explore Some of Australia's Best Diving Sites with Sue Warner

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Dive Christmas Island

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS (SHARED)

Cocos Keeling Island & Christmas Island Dive

15 DAYS / 14 NIGHTS (SHARED)



When Sue Warner, dive specialist at Indian Ocean Experiences, first ventured into the deep waters surrounding Christmas Island, she was astounded. "The visibility was nothing like I had ever seen before and the experience was phenomenal," she remembers. 'I'd come from the United Kingdom, and at that moment I decided I was staying put in Australia."

Fast-forward a number of years, and Sue is one of Indian Ocean Experiences' lead dive tour specialists. "I love putting together Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands customised itineraries for divers," she says. "If a group has time to dive both locations, that's ideal. The islands are close to each other, but vastly different when it comes to diving."

Christmas Island boasts some of the longest drop-offs in the world (some up to five kilometres!), with over 60 dive sites to explore, and Sue says it's easy to spend days underwater and still have more to see.

"The sea caves are pretty special, but I'd have to say one of my favourite sites here is the Perpendicular Wall. It's one of the biggest drop-offs in the world and when you gaze down into the ether you see a seemingly endless tunnel of deep blue. There are beautiful sea

fans suspended on the wall, coral bushes stretching out to catch the currents, and usually dolphins and sharks gliding around."

"It's one of the biggest drop-offs in the world and when you gaze down into the ether you see a seemingly endless tunnel of deep blue."

The diving is completely different on Cocos Keeling Islands, and Sue says that it's an ideal dive location when a group comprises of people with different skill levels. "There are drop-offs here for advanced divers, while the shallow lagoon is ideal for beginners and, as an added bonus, we often see turtles, dolphins and sharks," she says.

"I especially enjoy taking people to a site called the Cabbage Patch. As you might have guessed, the corals here look just like huge cabbages."

CONTACT INFORMATION:

info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475

In Search of the Christmas Island Hawk Owl with Lisa Preston

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

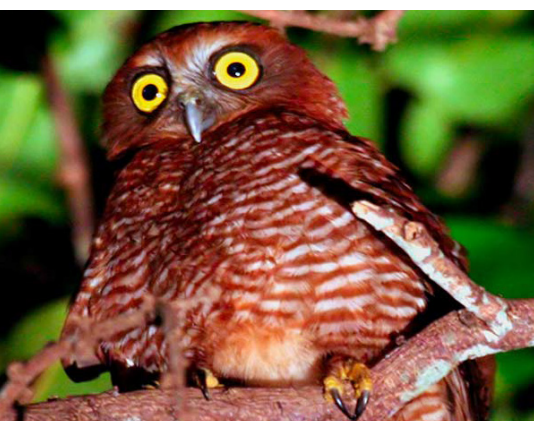
Christmas Island Citizen Science Week

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS (SHARED)



CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Contribute to citizen science programs tracking the Christmas Island Hawk Owl and other important bird species.



Six forest birds and 11 seabird species call Christmas Island home, and although not all of the island birds are endemic, Lisa Preston, manager of Indian Ocean Experiences, explains that all the birds are unique. "Our forest birds are small-bodied birds compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world," she explains. "Scientists think that when there was less food available, the smaller birds survived to propagate."

One of the island's most elusive birds to spot is the Christmas Island Hawk Owl, and Lisa enjoys it when she is leading a group that is up to the challenge of spotting one. "It's rare to see a Christmas Island Hawk Owl during the day, so we plan our sightings for the evenings. We aim to be in the forest searching for the owl from dusk onwards."

The island's hawk-owl is one of Australia's rarest raptors, and Lisa says that there are only about 340 mature birds on the island according to the latest count.

Lisa appreciates that guests on a bird-watching tour are keen on spotting an owl or two, so if there are no sightings one evening, she takes them to another location the next night for no additional cost.

"The owls tend to prefer dense rainforest, so we venture into some of the wilder parts of the island," she says. "They are tricky to spot. Not only are we limited to night tours, but they don't always respond to calls. For example, if it has recently rained they won't usually respond to our calls."

"The island's hawk-owl is one of Australia's rarest raptors, and Lisa says that there are only about 340 mature birds on the island."

Seeing a Christmas Island Hawk Owl is a highlight on any night, but Lisa says it's especially exciting when guests witness the raptor swooping down to grab dinner. "They eat insects, reptiles and even the occasional small bird, and seeing them chasing their prey is an electrifying experience."

CONTACT INFORMATION:

info@indianoceanexperiences.com.au
www.indianoceanexperiences.com.au
+61 8 9164 7475