

Dominica



Dominica is the largest and northernmost of the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles. Rising out of the Atlantic Ocean on its east coast and the Caribbean Sea on its west coast, this lush, tropical paradise is part of a group of volcanic islands that form the eastern boundary of the Caribbean Sea. The deep water of the Caribbean Sea offshore of Dominica is home to an abundance of cetaceans including the best-studied sperm whale population in the world. Nearly 200 resident sperm whales live year-round in clear, temperate, azure water ideal for in-water viewing and phenomenal encounters.

As the most mountainous and rugged of the islands, Dominica possess the richest biodiversity in the Lesser Antilles. Its volcanic peaks are blanketed by a luscious, multi-layered rainforest. Hundreds of swift flowing

highland streams cascade into deep gorges to form natural pools, hot springs and crater lakes. The rainforest is alive with a spectacular display of varied flora and fauna including rare species that are now extinct in other parts of the Caribbean. The steep mountains plunge to create dramatic coastlines and continue their sharp decline into the sea, providing the foundation for coral reefs that support a rich diversity of marine life.

The scenic volcanic features and luxuriant tropical wilderness found in Dominica have earned it the title of 'The Nature Island of the Caribbean'. Dominican citizens have sought to preserve its pristine beauty by creating an extensive natural park system and by discouraging the kind of high-impact tourism that has damaged nature in most of the Caribbean. The most stunning tropical forest on the island, the Morne Trois Pitons National Park, is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

The plethora of pristine and interesting scenery within its well preserved eco-system make Dominica a world-class destination for active travelers who enjoy nature and outdoor adventures. Visitors can hike, swim, trek to waterfalls, luxuriate in hot springs, enjoy amazing scuba diving, and absorb the beauty of daily doses of rainbows. The highlight for marine mammal enthusiasts is the opportunity to meet and spend time in the water with sperm whales.

Climate

The climate in Dominica is tropical with characteristically warm, comfortable temperatures moderated by northeast trade winds and plentiful rainfall. Most of the rainfall occurs on the eastern or windward side of the island,

while the leeward Caribbean coast is sheltered from both wind and rain by the mountainous terrain. Dominica experiences a wet season and can be vulnerable to hurricanes during summertime in the Northern Hemisphere.

The peak time of the year to visit Dominica and swim with sperm whales is during the dry season from late fall until early spring. The average daily temperature is between 82 – 84 degrees in the daytime dropping into the low 70's at night. There are still occasional rain showers during those months, however they tend to be short in duration and often result in a gorgeous panorama of rainbows.



Accommodations

We will be staying in the heart of the island at the historic Fort Young Hotel in the capital city of Roseau. This oceanfront property is situated on a hill overlooking the Caribbean Sea and was the site of Dominica's first fort built in 1699. Over the centuries the site has served as a fort, the central police station, and is now the location of Dominica's best known luxury hotel.

The hotel is nestled in downtown Roseau within short walking distance to the main outdoor marketplace and local restaurants. Natural scenic sites including the Botanical Gardens, Trafalgar Falls, Titou Gorge, and several sulphur hot springs are only a few minutes away by car. Fort Young has an onsite dive shop and its own private jetty where we will meet our boat each morning to begin our daily whale watching adventures.

Guests of Adventure Quest X will be staying in oceanfront rooms containing a king sized bed or two double beds. Each room has a view to a breathtaking expanse of Caribbean sea and sky punctuated by the sounds of gentle waves lapping the shoreline. Guests can unwind each afternoon in rooftop jacuzzis and an infinity pool, or can schedule a relaxing massage at the hotel spa.

Fort Young hosts one of the best restaurants in Dominica where the views are exquisite and the island-inspired food is fresh, healthy and delicious. The chef combines the finest of local cuisine with creative twists on international classics to produce a tantalizing blend of traditional and contemporary flavors. If guests prefer a

quiet evening to themselves, they can enjoy tasty meals on their own private balcony via room service.



Passive In-Water Whale Encounters with Sperm Whales



Sperm whales, known by scientists as *Physeter macrocephalus*, are the largest *odontocetes* or toothed-whales in the world. They are distributed throughout all of the oceans on Earth but are primarily found in the temperate and tropical waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The western coast of Dominica is inhabited by a large and extensively documented group of resident sperm whales.

Adult male sperm whales are highly migratory, moving into high latitude temperate waters during summer to lead a solitary lifestyle. Female and immature sperm whales form social units and remain grouped in tropical or subtropical waters like the Caribbean Sea. The size and membership of these matrilineal family units is relatively stable, varying only with new births, deaths,

and the dispersement of males once they reach adolescence. In winter, the bulls return to the lower latitudes and tropical waters for mating.

For the past ten years, a team of dedicated researchers has conducted an integrative and technically innovative study of the Caribbean sperm whale population. Their data consists of thousands of hours of observation, sound recordings and photo-identification of the whales as well as biological sampling for genetic, blubber and diet analysis. The main objectives of the study focus on social behaviors and vocal communication among social units.

The Dominica Sperm Whale Project has identified approximately 200 individual whales who are distributed among 17 social units who live year-round in the area. The long term nature of the study has allowed researchers to follow many calves from birth through weaning, enabling them to recognize the whales as individuals within families. It is now known that some of the families have been inhabiting this region for decades and likely for centuries.

Although they are considered an apex predator, sperm whales are docile and curious during encounters with humans. The Dominican government regulates in-water interaction with these whales by issuing a limited number of research permits each year enabling this activity. Adventure Quest X has acquired the necessary permits to allow for our guests to enter the water with these incredible marine mammals.

The Adventure Quest X team is working in collaboration with local researchers to support their long-term research objectives. Our guests will be asked to contribute images,

videos, and sound recordings collected during our daily excursions to augment the existing body of data. We have the unique opportunity to enjoy the thrilling experience of swimming eye-to-eye with sperm whales while contributing valuable input to ongoing scientific and conservation endeavors.



Daily Excursions

Each morning we will be met by our boat at Fort Young's private jetty to venture out to meet, observe and swim with sperm whales. The boat will pick us up at 7:30 a.m. and will return to the dock at 3:30 p.m.

Once aboard ship we will motor offshore and along the western coast of the island looking for spouts and using acoustic monitoring to locate the whales. Once we find them we will observe their behavior as the boat maneuvers into position for us to quietly enter the water in our snorkeling gear. An in-water guide will direct you

to the best vantage point to see, hear, and experience the magnificent sperm whales.

During our expeditions we'll take occasional breaks from our whale watching activities to cruise near shore to enjoy snorkeling sites along the coast. We are sure to visit the famous Champagne Reef featuring a bubbling hot water springs just a few yards from the shoreline.

Lunch and a variety of snacks are served on the boat. There will be a plentiful supply of water and fruit juices to keep us well-hydrated and guests can imbibe fresh home-made rum punch at the end of our day on the sea.

In addition to sperm whales, we are likely to encounter an abundance of other cetaceans who inhabit the eastern Caribbean Sea. Spinner, bottlenose, and pantropical spotted dolphins are commonly seen in the area. Humpback whales are known to swim through the region as part of their migratory journey. We may also find orcas, false killer whales, short-finned pilot whales, pygmy and dwarf sperm whales, Risso's dolphins, common dolphins, Atlantic spotted dolphins, and Bryde's whales in these cetacean-rich waters. Dominica is truly a whale-watcher's paradise!