

Panama Canal, Corals & Cultures

A Wildlife & Cultural Expedition Linking Two Oceans

with Amelia Dalton and
Guest Lecturers Lee Durrell and Andy Bunten
16th February - 2nd March 2012



Red and Yellow Macaw by Edward Lear



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The Ultimate Travel Company and Noble Caledonia have joined forces for a unique wildlife expedition in association with the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust on the *MS Island Sky*'s maiden voyage to Central America and the Caribbean.

I am so excited to be involved with another Durrell Expedition aboard the Island Sky.

As one of the greatest 20th century champions of biodiversity conservation, Gerald Durrell led the way in demonstrating how zoos could and should play a vital role in saving species from extinction. But that was not his only legacy. He established a 'mini-university', which has been attended by more than 2,500 conservation practitioners from 130 countries, collectively called Durrell's Army. We will meet some of the 'best and brightest' of the graduates on our journey, and hear how they are carrying on Durrell's crusade.

*I am delighted with the cruise itinerary for a more personal reason. It will take me back to places where Gerry and I worked on *The Amateur Naturalist*, a popular television series we made in the early '80s. We filmed in the rich and fascinating jungles of an island formed when the floodgates to the Panama Canal were first opened nearly a hundred years ago. We also filmed in the magical San Blas Islands, known for their white sand beaches and exquisite reefs, where the snorkelling was remarkable. The San Blas are home to the makers of the intricate reverse appliqué mola cloths, the Kuna Indians, a people who had had little experience of the outside world when Gerry and I were there. I wonder how much things have changed? Come with me to find out!*



Lee Durrell
Honorary Director
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust



Zodiac landing platform

Day 1: Thursday, 16th February

London / San José, Costa Rica

Depart London Heathrow on Iberia morning flight, via Madrid to San José. Overnight at the Hotel Ramada Herradura. Dinner under own arrangements.

Day 2: Friday, 17th February

San José / Puntarenas, Costa Rica

Morning visit to the Gold Museum and brief city tour of San José. Lunch at the hotel. Meet a Durrell graduate involved in Costa Rica's hugely varied wildlife before the scenic drive to Puntarenas on the Pacific coast to embark on *MS Island Sky* and sail in the early evening.

Day 3: Saturday, 18th February

Isla Caño, Costa Rica

Hosted by a Durrell graduate, spend the day on this remote island, walking and snorkelling. With its mysterious stone spheres, believed to be a pre-Columbian burial ground, and gorgeous coral reefs, the Caño Biological Reserve is also home to a huge variety of marine life including turtles, dolphins, manta rays, moray eels, barracudas, tuna, snapper, grouper and, on occasion, whales.

Day 4: Sunday, 19th February

Isla Coiba, Panama

This once infamous prison island, now a National Park, has reverted to an island paradise. Morning exploration of the 38 tiny surrounding islands dotted along the northern coast with their amazing beaches and coral reefs alive with all manner of fish. Later, explore the main island, which boasts some 147 species of birds, and walk up to the observation tower.

Day 5: Monday, 20th February

Darien, Panama

Following a night crossing of the Golfo de Panama, arrive at the wild, rugged and remote Darien Province. Travel up river to an Embera Indian settlement, untouched by the modern world. These little known tribes offer a fascinating glimpse of an ancient world that has changed little since Sir Frances Drake was ransacking the shore of the Spanish Main.



Days 6 & 7: Tuesday, 21st & Wednesday, 22nd February Panama Canal transit

A highlight of the expedition, the Panama Canal transit takes between eight and ten hours including crossing Lake Gatun, one of the largest man-made lakes in the world. A daylight transit cannot be guaranteed as cargo vessels have priority so these two days will be tailored to suit.

Special behind-the-scenes visit (thanks to Durrell) to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in mid-Canal at Barro Colorado, with an opportunity to experience areas of the island not usually open to visitors, including, it is hoped, seeing the forest canopy from a special 'aerial platform'.

The intention is to anchor off the research island for a memorable day at the institute which, for more than 80 years, has been studying the island's lush forest with its monkeys, slow-moving sloths, anteaters and many bird species. In addition visit either the vibrant metropolis of Panama City or the once important 17th century trading and military Caribbean port of Portobello with its defensive forts and burial site of Sir Francis Drake.

Day 8: Thursday, 23rd February San Blas Islands, Panama

Visit the stunning San Blas Archipelago made up of over 400 islands which line the north coast of Panama with dazzling white sandy beaches set in a turquoise sea and superb snorkelling. The islands are home to the indigenous Kuna Indians who gained self-rule from the government of Panama in the 1920s and maintain their traditional way of life including the production of colourful fabric art known as 'molas'.

Day 9: Friday, 24th February Cartagena, Colombia

Today there is a choice between a walking tour of the colonial walled-city of Cartagena, virtually surrounded by water and steeped in history, with a wealth of 16th and 17th century buildings and churches; or a visit by boat to the nearby Rosario Islands at Isla Baru, encircled by coral reefs. A Durrell graduate will give an introduction to the newly-built aviary holding a collection of Birds of Colombia and projects conserving endangered marine life.

Day 10: Saturday, 25th February At sea

A day at sea. Relax on deck, listen to lectures from the on-board team of specialists on birds and marine life and hear a talk by Lee Durrell.



"Thank you for the wonderful programme you put together; it was a very special experience and a memorable holiday."

(A 2010 expedition member)

Day 11: Sunday, 26th February Bonaire

In Bonaire, world famous for the variety of its corals, fish and exceptionally clear waters, visit the Washington/Slagbai National Park, created to protect some of the Caribbean's last remaining desert habitat. The island's bird life is remarkable including flocks of native parrots and in one of the lagoons a resident flock of flamingos. Bonaire's largest town, Kralendijk, is a charming place with many fine examples of classic Dutch colonial architecture.

Day 12: Monday, 27th February Los Roques, Venezuela

The beaches of this group of tiny Venezuelan islands are amazing, with fine coral sand, and are virtually deserted, with lagoons and atolls all round and the clearest water imaginable. Spend the day exploring this pristine archipelago where the breeding of four species of turtle is studied at Dos Mosquises Sur. The area is also a mecca for divers.

Day 13: Tuesday, 28th February Los Testigos, Venezuela

Sail to the untouched Los Testigos where again there are wonderful empty beaches with only a handful of resident fishermen. The island has a huge colony of frigate birds and behind the line of coconut trees are high dunes with stunning views for those prepared for the steep climb.

Day 14: Wednesday, 29th February Tobago Cays & Bequia, Grenadines

This morning explore the four tiny islets of Tobago Cays, a marvellous area of protected national park, famous for its incredibly beautiful reefs. Over lunch sail to the delightful Grenadine island of Bequia. A place of pure old world atmosphere, only seven miles by two, the island has a tradition of boat building, and Port Elizabeth has a charming waterfront with small boutiques and wooden villas.

Days 15 & 16: Thursday, 1st & Friday, 2nd March Barbados / London

Disembark this morning. Time for a short day in Barbados, with lunch under own arrangements, before a British Airways overnight flight to London Gatwick, arriving on Friday 2nd March.



Cartagena



*"...I snorkelled off the reef;
on a sea warm as consommé
I lay spread-eagled. Below
me, flashed a fluorescent
confetti of fish."*

(A 2008 expedition member)

Expedition Prices:

Magellan Deck Standard Forward Suite: £5,995 per person

Magellan Deck Standard Suite: £6,695 per person

Columbus Deck Superior Suite: £7,295 per person

Marco Polo Deck Premium Suite: £7,995 per person

Marco Polo Deck Corner Suite: £8,295 per person

Erikson Deck Deluxe Balcony Suite: £8,895 per person

Explorer Deck Owners Balcony Suite: £9,395 per person

Single Occupancy Prices:

Magellan Deck Standard Forward Suite: £7,795

Magellan Deck Standard Suite: £8,495

Columbus Deck Superior Suite: £9,095

*You may wish to extend your trip in Costa Rica or in the Caribbean.
Further information is available upon request.*

Flight upgrades are available on request.

Expedition Cost includes:

Economy class scheduled international flights; accommodation throughout; all meals (except dinner 16th February and lunch 1st March), wine and soft drinks at lunch and dinner on board the ship; gratuities for ship's crew; shore visits with local guides, tips and transport as listed; entrance fees; portage; services of tour escort and guest speakers; one year's membership of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.

Expedition Cost does NOT include:

Air passenger duty, passenger service charge, airline security charges, airport taxes and fuel surcharges where applicable (approx £295 as at 21/10/10); dinner 16th February and lunch 1st March; travel insurance; visa costs (where applicable); items of a personal nature (e.g. laundry); government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication on 21/10/10; currency fluctuations (costs based 21/10/10 on £1 = \$1.57).

Existing members of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust will receive a reduction of £100 per person.

Please note a certain degree of fitness is required.

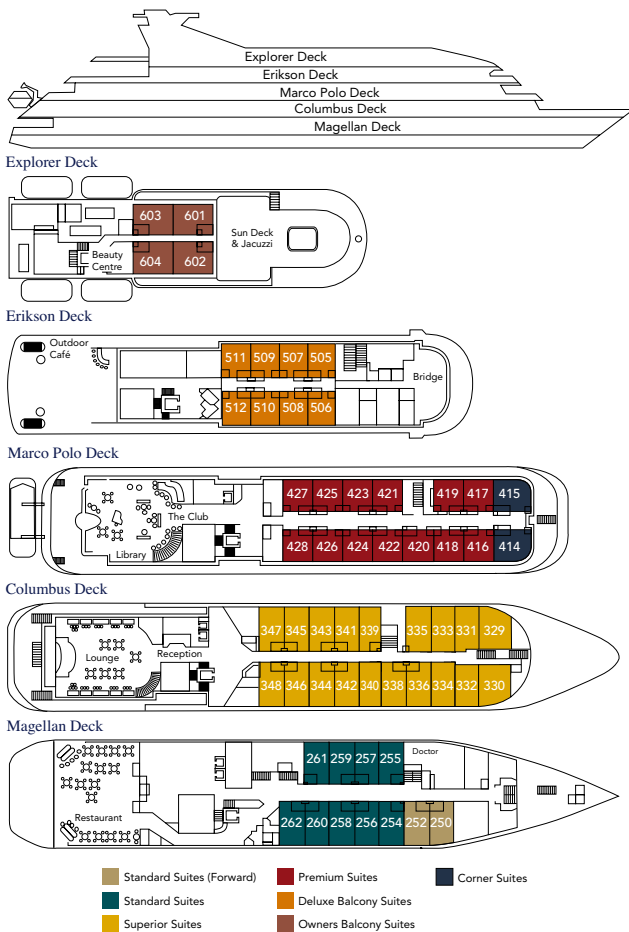


MS Island Sky

MS Island Sky is an excellent small expedition ship with a fleet of zodiac rubber boats for beach landings. With a maximum passenger capacity of only 116, a vessel of her size is capable of carrying many more but instead the ship has the benefit of exceptionally spacious and comfortable all-suite cabins, some with balconies, each with a private bathroom and sitting area.

The ship has a crew of 75 and generous public areas, spread over three decks which include a lounge, dining room, piano bar, library and small beauty salon. There are extensive sun decks, a spa pool, and an outdoor dining area and bar. The ship underwent a significant multi-million pound refurbishment in May 2010.

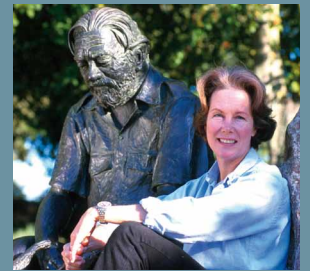
MS Island Sky operates under the Lloyds International Code for Safety and Pollution Prevention.





Dr Lee Durrell

Since childhood Lee has had a love and affinity for animals, studying animal behaviour as a postgraduate in Madagascar. Marriage to Gerald Durrell resulted in a unique 16 year wildlife partnership with numerous television series and accompanying books, such as *Ark on the Move*, *The Amateur Naturalist* and *Durrell in Russia* as well as her own book *The State of the Ark*. Lee established and managed the Trust's conservation programme in Madagascar from the mid '80s until 2000. As Honorary Director, she plays an important ambassadorial role for the Trust and maintains a key position on the Board of Trustees.



Andy Bunten

An obsessive enthusiast about wildlife since he can remember, Andy has worked in nature conservation all his life for wildlife trusts, local government and, for 26 years, for the RSPB. He was RSPB's Regional Director for the South East of England for five years before, in 1991, moving to the North of England to take up the reins of Director there. He is widely travelled, having led trips as far afield as Spitsbergen and the Seychelles, as Egypt and Hungary. He has been on numerous trips to see the wildlife of this fantastic Central America area, finding such amazing species as quetzals and howler monkeys in Costa Rica and countless hummingbirds and the superb scarlet ibis in Venezuela. Andy also has also pursued Central America's many winter migrant species that spend their summers in North America.



Amelia Dalton

After operating her own small expedition vessel in Scotland for ten years, Amelia combined her experience and knowledge of the natural and cultural worlds to establish unique programmes for one of the world's leading luxury small ship companies. She has led many expeditions both on land and sea for a number of prestigious companies throughout Northern Europe, the Baltic, Black Sea, Africa and the Indian Ocean where she led the 2008 and 2010 Durrell adventures. She is eminently suited to lead this unique expedition, being passionate about the unusual flora and marine life of Central America, and has created this unique voyage especially for the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, specifically to visit the remote communities and islands of the area.



Amelia will be very happy to talk to you about any aspect of the expedition or *MS Island Sky*, so please do feel free to contact her directly on: 020 7823 5612 or email travelbydesign@ameliadalton.co.uk



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