ITINERARY
Cruising the Islands of the Indian Ocean
February 22–March 4, 2021

The deluxe, five-star Le Bougainville is one of a series of six new luxury PONANT Expedition ships, launching 2018–2020. These state-of-the-art vessels combine PONANT’s understated elegance with a spirit of adventure and feature Blue Eye, the world’s first underwater passenger lounge. Le Bougainville is a small-capacity ship with just 92 staterooms and a crew of 110. We’ll enjoy attentive service, gourmet French-inspired cuisine, and a relaxed, congenial ambiance. The PONANT EXPLORER ships are certified Clean Ships and meet the highest environmental standards for energy conservation and resource management.

Daily activities are not listed out below, just the destination. That is because each day will provide the opportunity to explore these regions by Zodiac, on foot, and in the water. For those interested, there will be an onboard diving instructor who will assist in arranging unforgettable snorkels and dives.

BLD indicate which meals are included in the program fee.

OPTIONAL PRE-CRUISE PROGRAM

Saturday, February 20
Arrive Antananarivo, Madagascar
On arrival, make your way to the group hotel.

Sunday, February 21
Antananarivo | Mantadia National Park
Enjoy lunch at Vakona Forest Lodge and explore the private game reserve, with a nocturnal excursion to spot wildlife. (BLD)

Monday, February 22
Mantadia National Park
Look for the park’s 14 lemur species, diademed sifakas, short-horned chameleons, iridescent Madagascar tree boas, Madagascar paradise-flycatchers and the vanga. (BLD)

Tuesday, February 23
Mantadia National Park | Antannanarivo | Nosy Be
Return to Antananarivo today for a charter flight to Nosy Be, where we embark Le Bougainville in late afternoon. (BLD)

MAIN ITINERARY

Monday, February 22
Depart USA
Depart from your home town.

Tuesday, February 23
Nosy Be, Madagascar | EMBARK
If you arrive today (the official program start date), an airport to ship transfer and luggage handling are included. (D)
Wednesday, February 24  Nosy Komba and Nosy Tanikely
Nosy Komba is covered in dense tropical rainforest that serves as home to black lemurs — furry orange-brown and black creatures that are surprisingly agile and call to each other from amongst the trees. The many small beaches and the emerald-colored water make Nosy Komba a special place for snorkeling as well. Nosy Tanikely offers a magnificent white sand beach bordering a lagoon of crystal-clear waters. The uninhabited island has exceptional marine and terrestrial biodiversity and is a perfect spot for swimming and snorkeling. Hiking fans won’t be left out either: a stunning walk that climbs to the summit of the island lets you discover the old lighthouse built at the beginning of the 20th century and enjoy superb views over the ocean and surrounding islands. (BLD)

Thursday, February 25  Gloriosos, Scattered Islands, France
The geographical isolation and limited human settlement make the Scattered Islands a geological sanctuary. They offer their rare visitors almost pristine vegetation composed mainly of mangrove, as well as long beaches stretching out behind turquoise lagoons, and coral reefs that are home to the world’s highest concentration of sea turtles. (BLD)

Friday, February 26  Astove
Now uninhabited, Astove was once home to the employees who worked on the coconut plantations. Renowned for the richness of its sea beds, Astove Atoll is now a top destination for fishing enthusiasts. It also attracts experienced divers, who visit the atoll to explore the “Astove Wall,” where the sea floor drops to a depth of about 130 feet. The wall is covered in coral and many fish and green sea turtles can be found there. (BLD)

Saturday, February 27  Assumption, Seychelles Islands
Assumption Island is part of the Aldabra group of Outer Islands, situated in the southwest of the Seychelles. The island’s beaches are a major egg-laying and breeding site for sea turtles. The surrounding waters are ideal for snorkeling and scuba diving. This is where Jacques-Yves Cousteau filmed some of the scenes for his documentary The Silent World. (BLD)

Sunday, February 28  Cosmoledo Atoll
The Cosmoledo Atoll owes its nickname, the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, to the beauty of its underwater world: parrotfish, giant rays and clams inhabit the reefs of its crystal waters. The multi-colored fish make the most of the protection of the extraordinary coral reef, coming together to feed in the currents formed by the sweeping movements of the tides. Exploited in the past for coconut and agave, the atoll is now uninhabited, apart from an eco-resort in the heart of the nature reserve, which shelters green turtles and significant colonies of sooty terns and red-footed boobies. (BLD)

Monday, March 1  Alphonse Island
Like Astove, Alphonse Island has a history of coconut processing, and also like Astove, it is now a tropical paradise. Home to an abundance of marine mammals, sea turtles and birds, it is particularly known for its rich underwater life and coral, among the best preserved in the Indian Ocean. (BLD)

Tuesday, March 2  Saint Joseph Atoll
In the heart of the Seychelles’ Outer Islands, the Saint-Joseph Atoll is a magnificent ring of coral islets surrounding a splendid lagoon. Since 2014, it has been an integral part of the “D’Arros and St. Joseph Atoll Special Reserve,” a national park and protected marine area that preserve the unique biodiversity of these sites. This veritable nursery for Hawksbill sea turtles, juvenile reef fish, including several
species of ray and shark (blacktip reef shark, sicklefin lemon shark) attracts big fish that swim up from the drop-off of the Amirantes plateau, located only two kilometers from the atoll. (BLD)

Wednesday, March 3  Praslin
Praslin’s idyllic beaches, where granite rocks nestle in immaculate sand, correspond perfectly to how we imagine the Seychelles to be. They invite visitors to dive into the turquoise waters, which are ideal for snorkeling. In the center of the island lies the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In this veritable plant sanctuary, several endemic species of palm trees can be observed, as well as the famous sea coconut, which can weigh up to 40 pounds. (BLD)

Thursday, March 4  Victoria, Mahé | DISEMBARK
Group transfer to the airport for your individually-booked flights home. (B)

PROGRAM INCLUSIONS
• Comprehensive 9-night cruise aboard the deluxe Le Bougainville. All accommodations are outside staterooms and suites, and all feature a private balcony.
• Complete program of expedition excursions via Zodiacs led by experienced naturalists
• Lectures and briefings by Expedition Leader and naturalists
• All meals aboard ship including coffee & pastries, breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, and sweets from Ladurée
• French-inspired gourmet cuisine, with menu creation and chef training by Ducasse Conseil
• Complimentary open bar aboard ship including select wines served with lunch and dinner
• Welcome and farewell cocktail receptions aboard ship
• 24-hour room service
• Unlimited WiFi
• Airport/pier transfers and handling of luggage
• Gratuities to shipboard personnel, porters, guides, and drivers
• Port taxes and charges
• Pre-departure materials