

SARDINE RUN

Animal Ocean Expeditions 2026





BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Greatest Migration on Earth

The sardine run is one of the most spectacular marine wildlife events on the planet. Every winter in South Africa, vast shoals of sardines migrate up the Wild Coast, followed closely by their predators. Sharks, dolphins, gannets, and whales hunt these sardine shoals, forcing them into tight bait balls. This *Sardine Run* is so rich in life that it's aired on BBC's *Blue Planet 2*; an event each person should see in their life at least once.

Our Expeditions

Our job is to get you in on the action. Animal Ocean have been operating sardine run expeditions on the Wild Coast since 2009. The knowledge and understanding gathered from years of direct observation of wildlife and weather makes us experts. We have been trusted by the BBC, Netflix and others to lead expeditions to capture this event on film. Multiple award-winning images have been taken under our guidance. Come and join us in 2025, and create memories of a lifetime as we share our 16 years of experience with you!

Mdumbi, Wild Coast, Transkei

Our expeditions are based in the rural village of Mdumbi, Transkei. This area is where Nelson Mandela grew up, and is one of the only remaining areas in South Africa where you can get a real African experience. Chiefs are the authority, livestock the currency and deep-rooted myths the philosophy of the amaXhosa who populate traditional mudbrick houses. You will stay on top of a hill boasting one of the world's most beautiful stretches of coastline. With secluded white sand beaches, and endless exploring, the Wild Coast will be your home base with us on this sardine run expedition.



Steve Benjamin



2026 RATES & DATES

6 Days / 7 Nights

R45 500

shared room

R50 500

private room

Trip dates still available for 2026 -

11 June to 18 June

22 July - 29 July

*add SCUBA - R5000 to any expedition

*add shuttle - R3000 (return trip from East London)

*Private shuttle options available

*Gear rental available R1500 for the trip





IMPORTANT INFO

Included:

- Weights
- Weight belt
- 1 x 10l Steel din cylinder (request)
- All meals and snacks
- Two marine guides per boat
- Accommodation
- Wifi (intermittent)

Not Included

- All diving or snorkeling equipment can be rented from us at nominal fee.
- Flights to East London/Mthatha
- Transfer to Mdumbi, this is arranged on request.
- Gratuities
- Alcohol
- GoPro 11 Rental

Terms & Conditions:

This is a natural phenomenon, much like a safari. We take advantage of all opportunities presented by the weather and wildlife each day. Baitballs are feeding aggregations of wildlife; they are unpredictable and cannot guaranteed. Boating is weather dependent and we cannot guarantee 6 days at sea. Other activities are arranged in the case of bad weather. Sadly no refunds for bad weather days.

50% non-refundable deposit is required to confirm a booking. Remaining 50% due 31st March 2025. Max 8 places per boat.





ACCOMODATION

The accommodation in Mdumbi is a wonderful mix of old and new. The accommodation is basic, rustic & rural-style Xhosa huts with separate shared bathroom facilities.

These characterful huts are clean and neat, and form part of Mdumbi Backpackers. The setting is what truly creates the magic of this experience; Mdumbi is the best place to experience the sardine run, with the best boat launch site on the Wild Coast, and the clean water of the Agulhas current. There is electricity throughout, with South African 3-pronged plug points for camera charging. Wi-Fi is best available in the central dining and reception area, and intermittently available in all rooms. Some days the wifi is poor due to weather conditions.

All meals are provided, including tea, coffee, lunch and snacks on the boat. A simple, cold breakfast is served in the morning so that we can launch as early as possible. We gather in the evenings to enjoy the dinner provided by the restaurant. Typical Xhosa-style bread and vetkoek are a highlight, with meat, fish, salad and veggies (lentil options available for vegetarians). Oysters, lobster and fresh fish are a highlight of the culinary service.

There is a communal lounge area with games and books to borrow. You can also rent a surfboard, go on a guided kayak up the Mdumbi river or take a walk around the area and across the beach during the afternoons.





YOUR HOSTS

Steve Benjamin

Steve is an underwater cameraman and marine guide with a background in marine science. The Sardine Run is his biggest passion and he's led expeditions for the last 16 years. Steve has advised, facilitated, and assisted on expeditions with National Geographic magazine, Netflix, and the BBC's Blue Planet II. He loves creating wild ocean experiences and rare photographic opportunities for clients. Join him to learn and explore the Sardine Run for an action-packed adventure that you won't forget!



Aiden Biccard

Aiden is an accomplished marine biologist with over a decade of professional experience. He is passionate about marine wildlife and biodiversity, and has dedicated a large portion of his career to fieldwork throughout Africa. Aiden is also a scientific and commercial diver and supervisor and has led many scientific research and tourism expeditions. Aiden has hosted sardine run expeditions for eight years and loves to facilitate wildlife encounters. Join him for an opportunity to experience this unique event!

You will be assigned to a boat with either Steve or Aiden as your host & guide for the week





GENERAL INFO

In the water

Freediving or snorkeling is our preferred method of following the action because sardine bait balls can move quickly. Scuba is available on request to those who are Padi Rescue Diver (or equivalent) certified and have dived recently. A windproof jacket is essential to wear over your wetsuit on the boat. A buff and beanie also help to keep warm when the boat is moving. The ocean water temperature varies from 20-22C, so we recommend a 5mm wetsuit with a hood.

On the land

Air temperatures range between 10-28C. Nights & early mornings are chilly, but it warms up quickly. Bring beach wear for the daytime and something warm for the evenings (jackets, beanies, warm socks etc). The early start to the day also necessitates a jacket!

The daily routine

We start the day early with a simple cold breakfast at 6:30am, and get on the boat at 7:30 and are on the water with the whales, dolphins and sardines until 3/4pm. The late afternoon is yours to relax, download images and enjoy the sunset after an action-packed day. Dinner will be served at 6:00 pm each night





PLAN YOUR TRIP

Everyone has their preferred method of joining us, so transport is not included in the expedition package. The Eastern Cape is known for its bad roads, and the last 2 hour stretch of road to Mdumbi is particularly bad. Potholes, sheep, goats and cattle make the drive very slow. Nevertheless, a small non-4x4 vehicle is suitable. We strongly advise not to drive during the night. There are 3 ways to get to us, and transfers can be organized as needed:

- 1) **Fly to East London Airport (Best Option)** - plus a 5-hour road transfer to Mdumbi.
- 2) **Fly to Mthatha Airport** - Limited flights from Johannesburg, plus a 2-hour road transfer
- 3) **Self drive to Mdumbi** - We will recommend the route based on the latest road conditions.

Transport is available on request at an additional cost from either East London or Mthatha Airport. Transfers depart no later than 12:00 from East London to avoid night time travel. Plan to arrive in Mdumbi by 4pm on the day of arrival.

Packing List

On the boat :

- Topside Camera
- Hat, Buff & Suncream
- Sunglasses with strap
- Rain jacket / wind breaker
- Dive gear + wetsuits
- Swimsuits
- Dry bag
- Water bottle

On the land :

- Warm evening wear
- Closed shoes
- T-shirts, shorts
- Flip-flops / water shoes
- Open shoes that can get wet
- Beanie and gloves
- Towel

General :

- Head torch + charger/spare batteries
- Wallet, cash
- Phone, charger
- Adapter for plugs
- Camera gear + chargers
- Books / Laptop
- Binoculars
- Sea sickness medication

Diving equipment :

It's best to bring your own personal dive-gear, including:

- Long-blade freediving fins are a must
- Underwater camera
- Min 5mm wetsuit.
- Wetsuit with hoodies are recommended
- Bootie socks
- Gloves



FAQs

Which airport do I fly into?

- We recommend flying in to East London airport as there are more flight options. Mthatha airport is closer, but only flies through Johannesburg and has limited flights. If flight schedules do align with your trip dates, flying to Mthatha airport is a good option and private shuttles can be arranged. Private shuttles are more expensive. Durban airport is too far away

What equipment should I bring?

- The water temperature is around 20°C. The wind chill factor can make one cold when on the boat. A 5mm wetsuit with a hood is suitable for most people, but if you get cold easily then a second layer is recommended. Long blade fins are essential, as well as gloves, booties. A windbreaker/rain jacket is essential to wear over your wetsuit while on the moving boat to keep the wind chill off you. Although all equipment can be rented from us, we recommend bringing your own because you will be more comfortable in your own gear. Please see packing list for full details.

Should I choose to freedive or SCUBA?

- The feeding action is very fast moving and difficult to keep up with. Freediving allows you to keep up with the action, and quickly get back on the boat to be repositioned. It is rare to have a static baitball, but in such cases scuba may be an option. There are reefs to SCUBA dive in the area, which is a nice activity to do when there are no baitballs. SCUBA diving in these conditions requires a high skill level due to it being in open water, fast moving, with large predators.

Will I get seasick?

- If you suffer from motion sickness, you'll need to bring medication, as we spend long hours on the boats each day. Ocean conditions can be rough, and often the best baitball action happens in rough conditions.

Is there wifi?

- Intermittent WIFI is available, but the signal varies due to weather conditions as we are in a remote location. The WIFI is not strong enough for conference calls, but social media and general communication is okay.





Orca



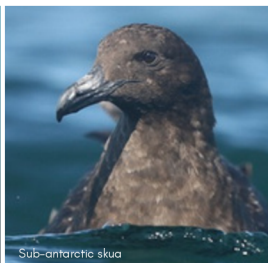
Humpback whale

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

You never know what you might find at sea on the Wild Coast. Here are images of other species we have photographed on our trips. Get those cameras ready, its a wild ride!



Ragged-toothed shark



Sub-antarctic skua



Indo-Pacific Bottlenose dolphins



Southern Right Whale



Cape Gannet



OTHER ACTIVITIES

It is possible that we may get a day when we can't go to sea due to big swells and strong winds. If this happens we will adventure together on the coast and kayak up the Mdumbi River or hike to the Mapuzi Seacaves.



WE LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!



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