

# MONSOON

with **MANTAS**



aboard the Ari Queen  
31st Aug to 7th Sept 2024

**DIVING SEASONAL SEAS**



**FOR ADVANCED OPEN WATER CERTIFIED DIVERS ONLY.**

**\*LIMITED SPOTS\***  
**\*FIRST 6 SPOTS AVAIL EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT\***

The **southwest monsoon** is an important time for landward ecosystems that many of us are familiar with. But have you ever wondered how these weather systems affect the vast body of the **Northern Indian Ocean** that surrounds the land masses of the south Asian countries? **Strong winds, choppy seas, and temperature and pressure gradients** result in a lot of nutrient upwelling, churning the ocean and creating rich and productive conditions that contribute to an **explosion of life** at its most foundational levels.

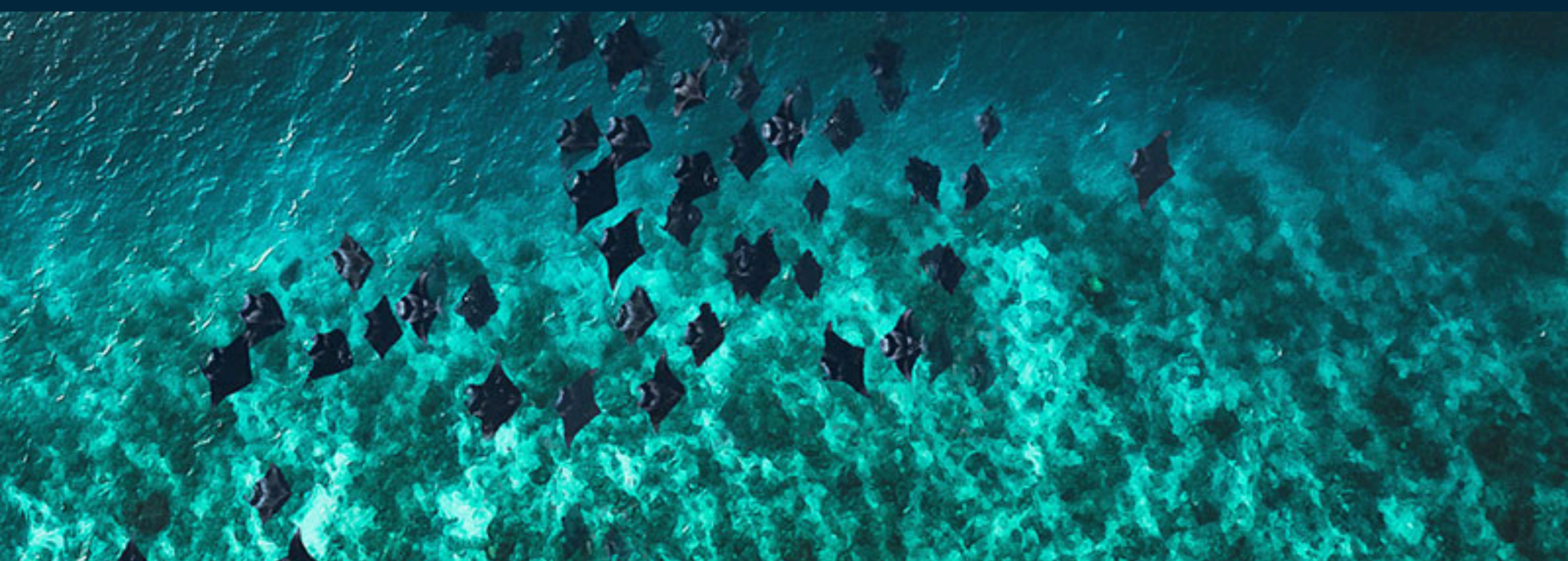
In many parts of the Indian Ocean, **plankton proliferates** and collects en masse. When observed within the limitations of our human vision, these microscopic organisms may not be much to write home about. But, in numbers that are unfathomable, they provide a smorgasbord to all manner of creatures big and small!

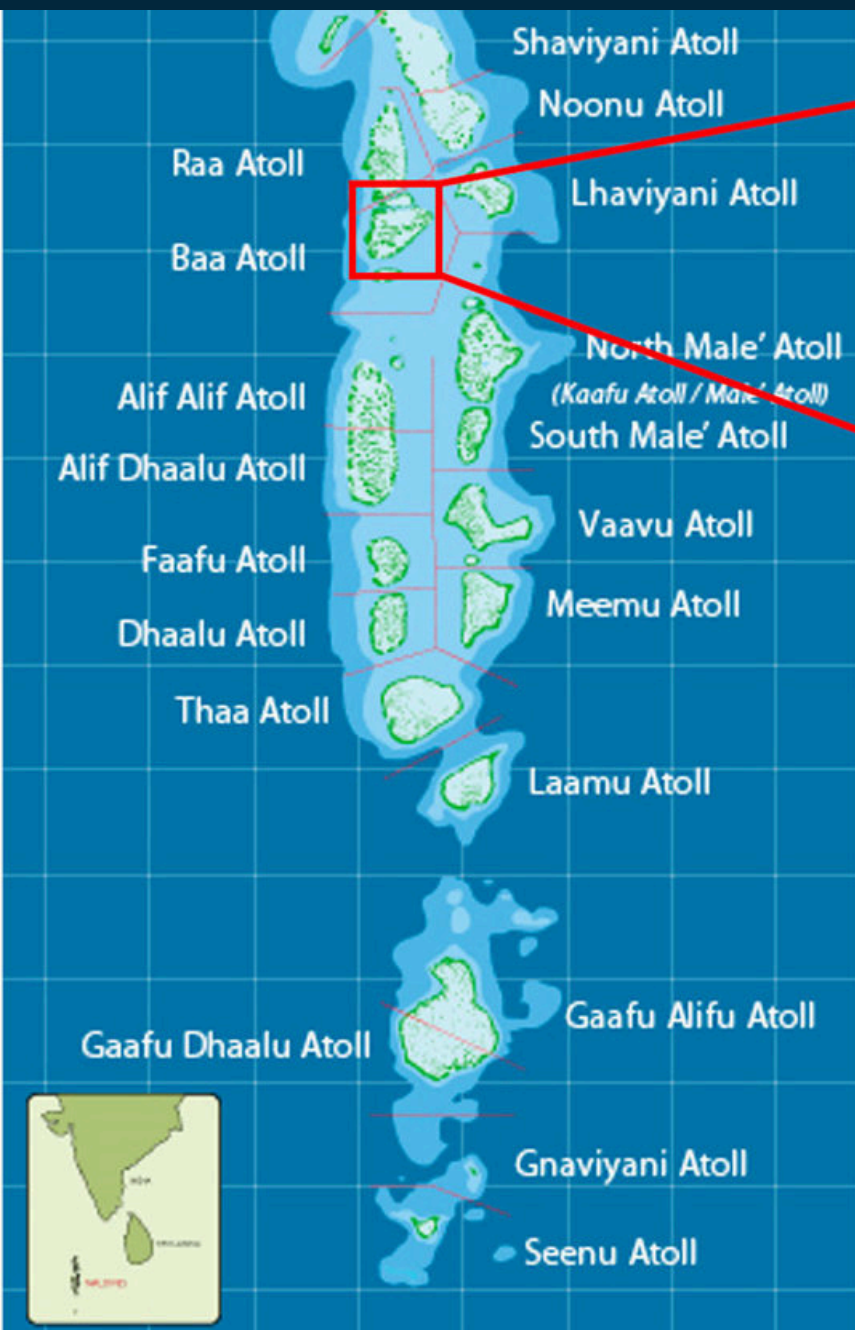
In a tiny nook in the Maldives - shaped by the unique bathymetry, shifting tides and swirling currents - rivers of plankton are swept into **Hanifaru Bay**. Under these very specific conditions, for a delicate window of a few months, this explosion in density of planktonic life beckons **giants of the ocean to a feast** - that one must see in order to believe.

**Hundreds of manta rays congregate at this fertile field** of water in the Baa Atoll to partake in the feast. Whale sharks from other parts of the Maldives are also lured to the banquet. But, that is not the only thing happening at this magical time of year. When you finally manage to shift your gaze away from these majestic behemoths, and **refocus your attention** on the “backdrop”, the system appears to dance - and you will start to notice how many coral reef processes are influenced by the seasonal shifting seas.

All manner of smaller creatures, both fish and invertebrates, benefit from this sudden surplus of food. Many using this opportunity to time their reproduction, ensuring that their offspring can make the most of this relatively **short-lived bonanza**.

As the monsoon wears on and eventually dissipates, the reefs of Baa Atoll are covered in clouds of juvenile fish - an atmosphere of **swirling, shimmering shapes** that will slowly fade at the turn of the new year - once again with a **shift in season** within our seas.



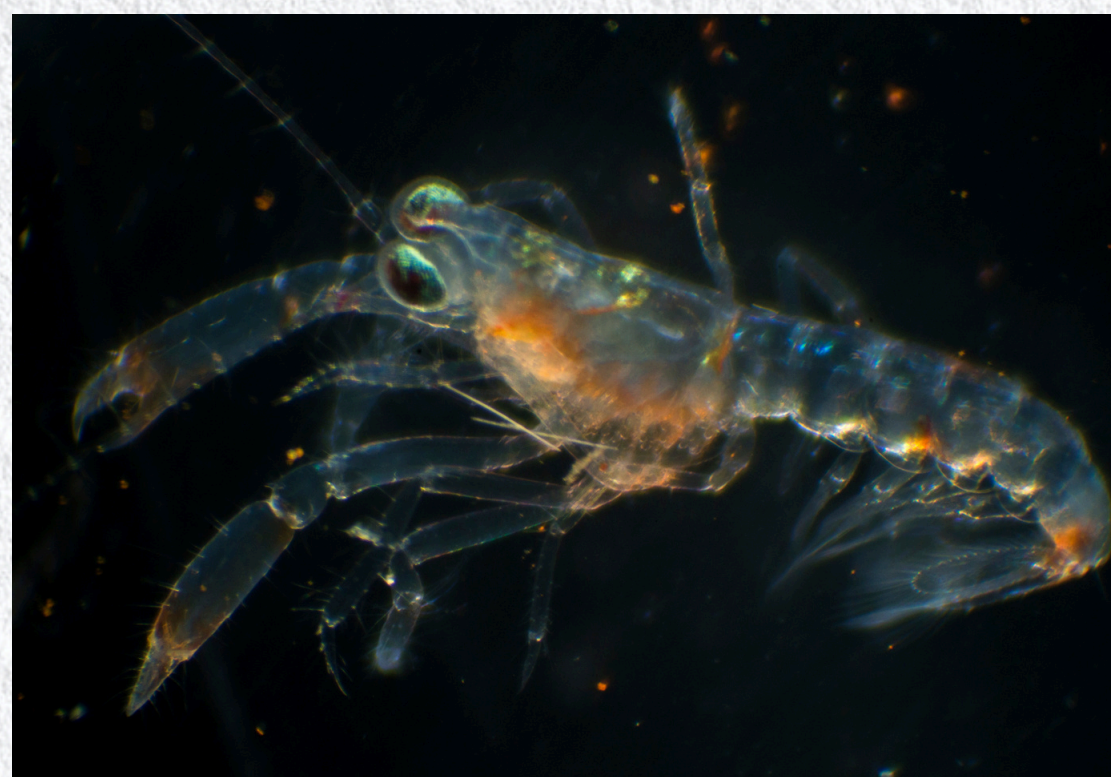


## BAA ATOLL, MALDIVES

8 days  
15 to 17 dives



The **Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve** is a **marine protected area** that has received significant attention from UNESCO and the world since 2010. Through the monsoon months, this **ecologically rich pocket** becomes a microcosm in which one can observe intricacies of marine processes that highlight connections between the Indian ocean and its **weather systems**. And while the manta ray may have become the poster-child of the magical Maldivian monsoon, we are also excited to share with you all the smaller marvels that unfold during this special season in this special corner of the **Indian Ocean**.





## WHAT WILL WE BE DOING ON THIS EXPEDITION?

During our week together at sea, we will curate a number of activities beyond the daily dives. We intend for this to augment your experience and understanding of the manta aggregation in Baa Atoll - collectively creating a layered picture of this incredible natural phenomenon.

### BRIEFINGS

Interactive, audio-visual discussions about the daily sightings, and details we want you to make special note of for your upcoming dives.



### PLANKTON TOWS

Making collections and observations at the back of the boat (with high chances of watching manta rays feeding on plankton attracted to the lights.)



## MICROSCOPY

Discovering the many invisible life forms that make up the plankton soup responsible for this extraordinary congregation. Plankton identification & microscope image making.



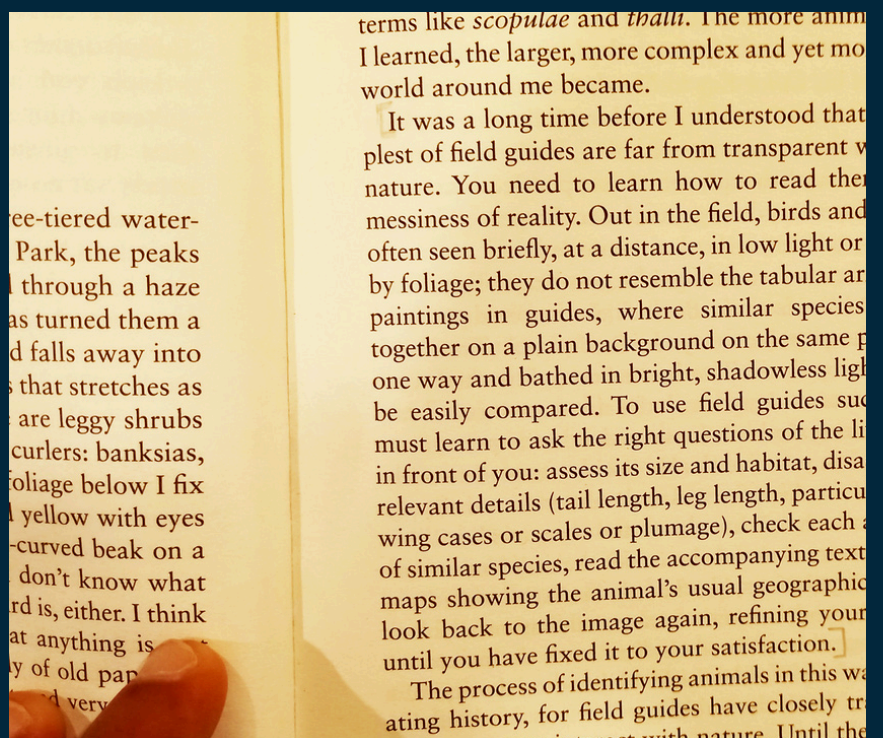
## PHOTOGRAPHY

Theory sessions and debriefs with tips / feedback on how to best capture the things we will be seeing (with shared use of our action cameras).



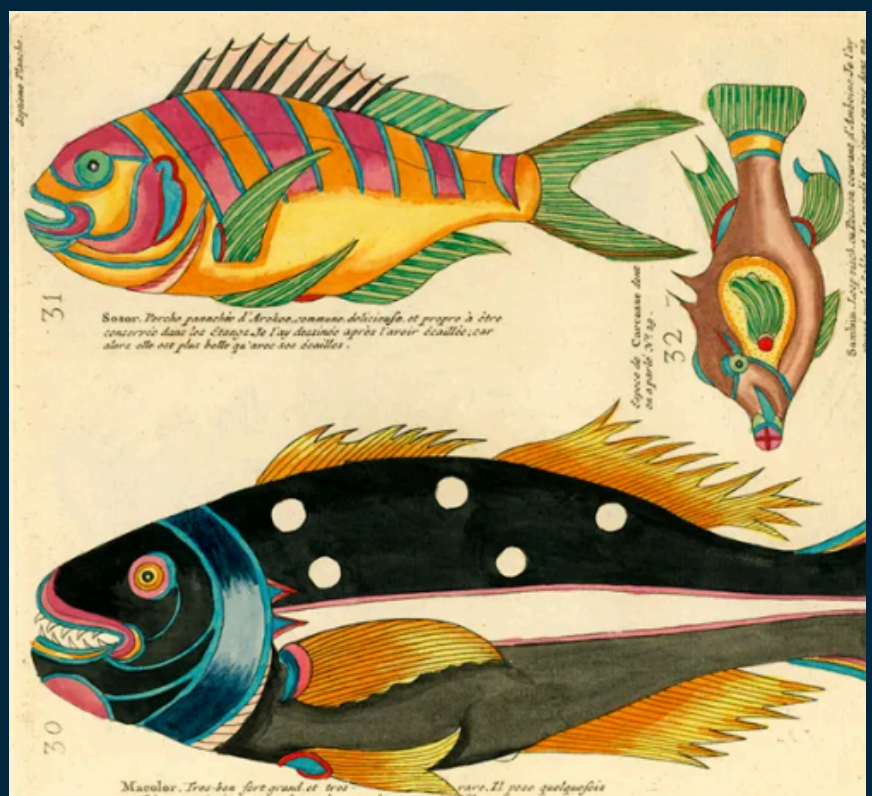
## READING ROOM

You will have access to a collection of books, papers and field guides, and can engage with curated excerpts of relevant literature, as well as reading weather and water.



## STUDIO

For those interested in creative documentation, we will have a range of art supplies, craft materials, print kits and more - to indulge your artistic side or experiment with journaling and abstractions.



# THE ARI QUEEN SAILING SCHEDULE



## **Day 1 - Saturday Aug 31:**

Arrival in the Maldives / Board Ari Queen / Briefings and Equipment distribution. Late afternoon check dive depending on arrival times.

## **Day 2 - Sunday Sept 01:**

Three dives as we move from Hulhumale to the north of Male Atoll.

## **Day 3 - Monday Sept 02:**

Morning dive. Sail to Baa Atoll (5-6 hours). Afternoon dive. Late afternoon dive if time permits.

## **Day 4 - Tuesday Sept 03:**

Three dives (and/or) Hanifaru snorkelling with mantas based on activity in the bay.

## **Day 5 - Wednesday Sept 04:**

Three dives (and/or) Hanifaru snorkelling with mantas based on activity in the bay.

## **Day 6 - Thursday Sept 05:**

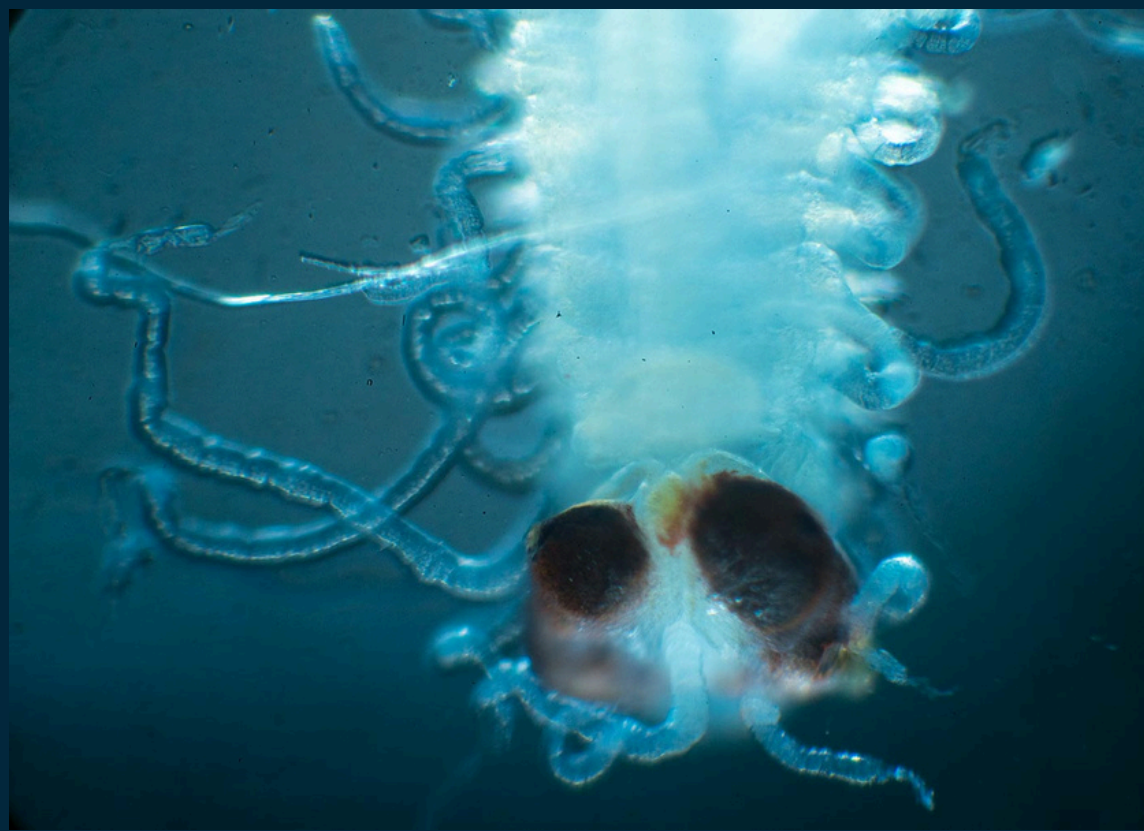
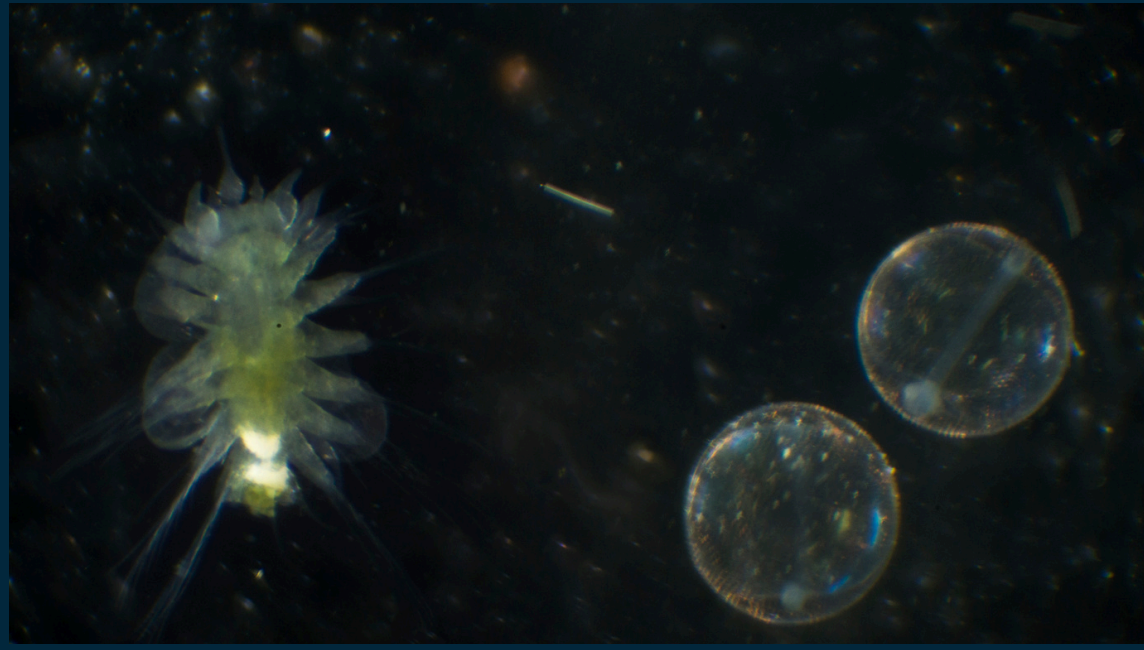
Morning dive. Sail back to Male Atoll. Afternoon dive. Late afternoon dive if time permits.

## **Day 7 - Friday Sept 06:**

Morning dive. Late morning dive (depending on 24-hour no-fly-times).

## **Day 8 - Saturday Sept 07:**

Disembark from Ari Queen 7.30 a.m. Departure



# WHY IS THIS FOR EXPERIENCED & SEASONED ADVENTURERS ONLY?

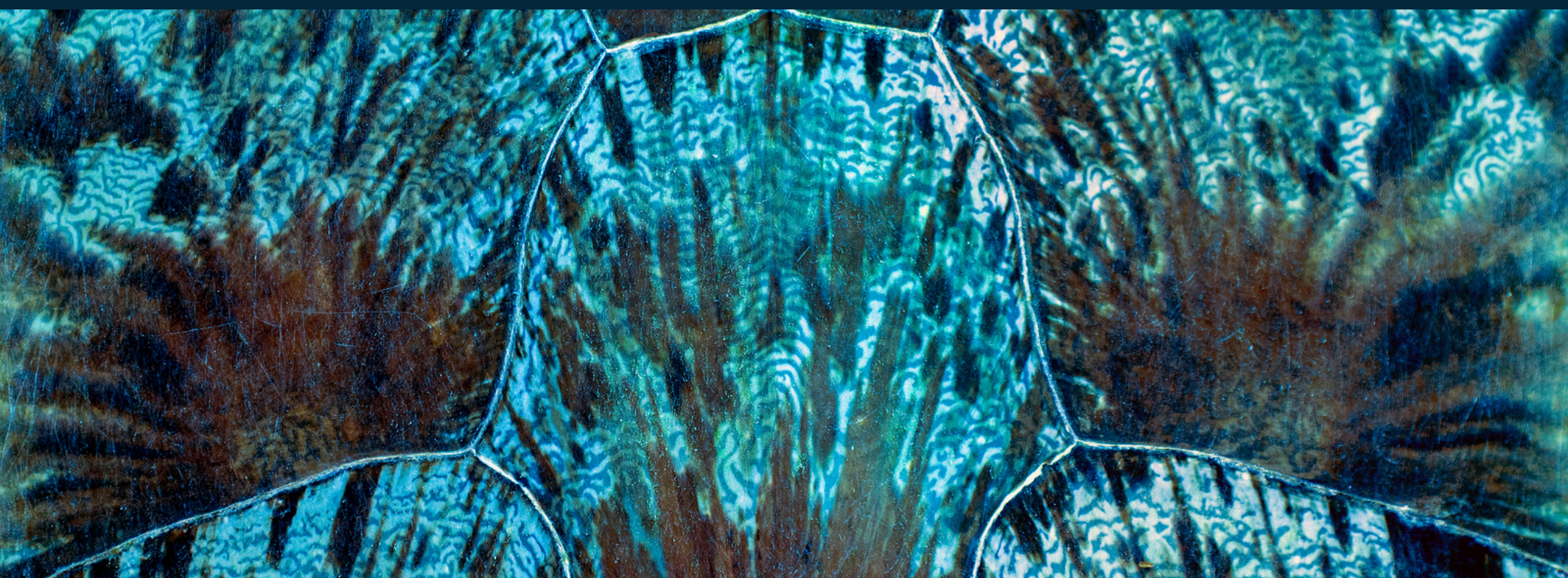
This sailing is open to experienced divers (with a **minimum of 50 dives**) for a reason. While the southwest monsoon brings this congregation of beautiful creatures to Hanifaru Bay, it also brings with it **rough seas, high winds, currents, murky waters** and overcast, rainy skies.

This is also an El Nino year with **unpredictable weather**. It is important to note that we probably will not have the sunny, picture-postcard Maldivian conditions that many people travel to the island nation for.

Our crossing from Male to Baa Atoll will very likely be bumpy. We will navigate and plan for **fluctuating winds**, using the natural shelter that the atolls offer. Yet, we are also gearing up for grey days and rainy weather, that **bring with it the magic that only happens during the monsoon**.

Additionally, as the predictability of weather systems decreases, this **El Nino year** may also affect possible shifts in the timing of the arrival of the mantas to Hanifaru Bay.

In anticipation of all this, we have chosen the **first new moon in September** - to account for delays in the prevailing winds, as experienced in many places across the Indian Ocean.







## WHATS INCLUDED

- **15 to 17 dives\***

*\* If mantas are sighted in Hanifaru Bay then our time snorkelling with them will be **INSTEAD** of a dive on one of the surrounding sites. (We will do a minimum of 15 dives assuming 2 visits to Hanifaru Bay)*

- **Hanifaru Bay park fees (up to 2 visits)**
- **Accommodation on twin-share basis**
- **3 meals per day + water**
- **Tea & Coffee**
- **TGST + green tax**
- **EarthCoLab facilitation, equipment and guides**
- **Use of action cameras on a shared basis**

## NOT INCLUDED & EXTRAS

**International Flights (to the Maldives)**

**Travel & Dive insurance**

**Alcoholic beverages**

**Gear Rental (all prices below are in USD for the entire week)**

BCD - 50

Reg - 50

Dive Computer - 50


Wetsuit - 50

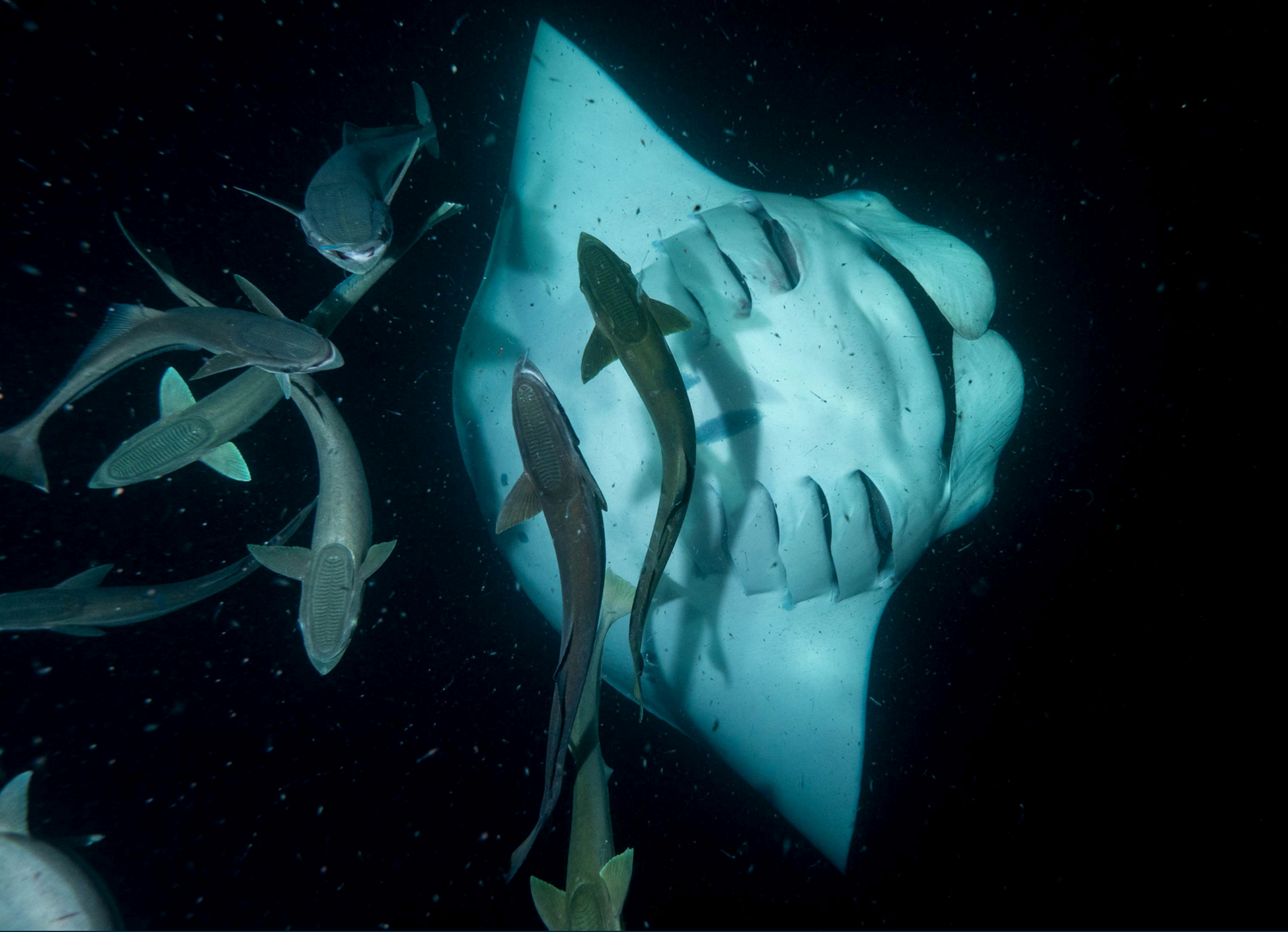
Mask & snorkel - 35

Fins - 35

Nitrox - 100

15 litre cylinders - 75





**TOTAL COST \$2,700**

**EARLY BIRD OFFER  
3 SPOTS AVAILABLE (CLOSES MARCH 31ST)**

**\$2,400**



**FOR INQUIRIES & PAYMENT DETAILS PLEASE CONTACT  
INFO@EARTHCOLAB.COM**

**OR MAKE AN ADVANCE PAYMENT OF USD 1,000 TO CONFIRM**

**BOOK NOW**

# YOUR GUIDES

**Umeed** would trade anything for a set of gills...

Initially having explored the world of academics through Marine Biology, Umeed realised that his heart and mind were happier while submerged. He has spent the last 28 years scuba diving, teaching and furthering the spirit of biophilia through his area of expertise. Professionally teaching as a PADI instructor, Umeed now conducts specialised underwater photography courses designed to address both ecology and photography. His imagery ranges from fine art to scientific documentation – his practice draws one's eye to aquatic systems and the detail within. Umeed has applied this combination of skills and interests across fields – with numerous popular publications, book and film contributions, exhibitions, educational material and in the setting up of a marine research dive facility on the Andaman Islands. He has been diving and exploring the Maldives since 1996, and loves looking for little gems off the beaten path.



**Tasneem** will do anything to avoid wearing shoes...

She has spent the last 18 years facilitating interdisciplinary initiatives in the fields of ecology, conservation, education and science communication. Her formal training is in marine zoology and the development of experiential learning pedagogies. After a decade in the Andaman & Nicobar islands, Tasneem managed operations for the Diva Andaman live-aboard in Thailand & set up the Vessel for Inquiry - leading dive expeditions and marine learning programs in the eastern Andaman sea. She is currently exploring the Atlantic, working on setting up a marine observatory and learning centre in Ireland. Her photography and writing are visible across scientific and popular publications, book contributions and in curricular content. She believes that learning across subject boundaries is fundamental. Sailing, diving, writing, image making and exploring are the binding factors in all her endeavours.

# YOUR GUIDES

**Savita** can be lured into anything if one uses a good book as bait ...

She is curious about how ideas of 'nature' and 'society' are produced and connected to one another. By drawing tools from the field of political ecology, she examines the relationship between knowledge and power in the process of place-making that depicts the oceans as a frontier(s). For many years, she has worked on public policies which affect livelihoods across fisheries, agrarian, and forest ecologies. She is interested in the locations of political-agency and the production of resistance mounted by coastal societies. More broadly, her work speaks to the imaginaries of people's relation to places that are at the cusp of land and sea. At Earth CoLab she specifically works on conceptualising and delivering our learning programmes, to which she brings perspectives on human geography, political economy and political ecology.



**Hayat** will ensure a fabulous meal and music regardless of where one is...

An accomplished musician, Hayat has spent several years introducing and teaching music to children. Her unique manner of developmental interaction impacts pedagogical approaches. A certified PADI dive Instructor for the last 11 years, Hayat has expanded her interest and love for the ocean, through dive education and training. Her strong administrative and organisational skills, along with a deep interest in wildlife have made her an integral part of many marine education programs, researcher dive training initiatives, scientific diving module development and citizen science efforts.