



Best of Blue

*Words and photography by
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A pod of Long-snouted Spinner Dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*) 'porpoised' a few hundred metres in front of the boat.

We had travelled for less than 40 minutes from Mirissa Harbour before our first encounter with cetaceans. I was on board with marine biologist Dr. Charles Anderson and two of his clients. We continued on and, soon afterward, encountered a Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*). Well, perhaps we may stop for a while and I could take a few images of the largest animal that has ever lived on this planet. Not this time. In the quest for sperm whales (*Physeter catodon*) we passed the Blue Whale. Blue Whales are thinly spread and very difficult to see. I can imagine an incredulous reader wondering how a group of photographers could pass a Blue Whale without pausing to photograph it?

The boat continued on, past the second, then the third, then the fourth, and the fifth – yes, the *fifth* Blue Whale. I would have been shocked into disbelief if I did not already know what was going on. By the time I boarded the boat with Charles, I had already been out a few times on my own and realised that Blue Whales were very easy to see and photograph in the seas south of Dondra Head, the southernmost point in Sri Lanka. Charles and his clients, together with Lighthouse (Hotel) naturalist Anoma Alagiyawadu, had

already encountered and photographed several Blue Whales, and were now focusing on their main quarry.

For three decades Sri Lanka had laboured beneath the misconception that its whale-watching prospects lay around Trincomalee. Charles Anderson had deduced from his marine research in the Maldives that a migration of whales would be taking place off Dondra in December, on their way to the Bay of Bengal and back again in April *en route* to the Arabian Sea to feed on the upwellings off Somalia. The first evidence for the theory surfaced when Simon Scarff and Sue Evans, who were training the boat crew from Mirissa Water Sports, began to report their encounters with whales in the Sri Lanka Wildlife eNewsletter that I compile. One thing led to another, and by April 2008 I was ready to break some exciting news to the world.

Sri Lanka is probably the best place in the world to see and photograph Blue Whales, and is almost certainly the best for seeing Blue Whales and Sperm Whales together. 🐋

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Sanyo's New Depths

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