HUMPBACK WHALES in TONGA

'Few things in life have the ability to so deeply touch your soul as the moment you look into the eye of Humpback Whale
The ocean is full of wondrous creatures both great and small. Few are capable of genuinely changing your perspective on life. Humpback whales are one of these animals. An encounter with humpbacks will absolutely alter your perception of your place in the world and will connect you to the ocean in a way that is both profound and incredibly simple.

When a humpback decides to make eye contact with you, they will peer right into your soul, immediately expanding your heart and mind. That voluntary connection will flood you with emotions and touch your inner being, demonstrating without a shred of doubt that this fellow earthling is just as self-aware as you are. If you are seeking a truly enlightening encounter with these gentle ocean giants, and the chance to capture those moments to share with others, join BigAnimals Expeditions in the South Pacific and start seeing the world with fresh eyes.

The warm water of Tonga, like in Hawaii and Dominican Republic, and the reef system make it safe and comfortable for the female to give birth and nurse the young one. The number of whales in and around the extensive Tonga reefs peak by mid August through September. Not only are the females here at this time the male humpbacks also arrive to locate a willing female, ready to mate. It is very possible that you will see what is called a “heat run” where several males are chasing one female. If she has an escort he will try to beat all others and it can be bloody, fast, loud and stunning display of power play among the male for the one female while she leads the parade. Be ready to be impressed and behold.

After what is likely extensive travel, you arrive in the Kingdom of Tonga. This utopian archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean is made up of 170 islands divided into three regions: Tongatapu, Ha’apai and Vava’u. Soon you are enjoying the beautiful views of Blue Lagoon Resort on Foiata Island in Vava’u. After settling into one of the picturesque fales (cabins) and relaxing to the incredible backdrop of green trees, blue water, and the calming sounds of the ocean at your doorstep, you’ll be ready for whales.

First thing in the morning, you’ll gear up and get on the boat to begin searching for humpbacks. Before long you see blows and breaches and it’s tempting to jump right in. It is entirely up to the discretion of the guide whether or not we enter the water with a whale.

Our guides work with these animals nearly every day so they know what behaviors to watch for and if the whales will be receptive to an interaction. We never chase whales; we only approach them with respect and let them dictate the terms of the encounter.

We timed our departure based on the peak performance of the Humpback arrival to Tonga. Every year female Humpback starts migrating to Tonga from Antarctica. In Antarctica the Humpies are feeding on the ocean rich in plankton, they arrive to Tonga starting in July in search of safe reefs to give birth and to mate.

The warm water of Tonga, like in Hawaii and Dominican Republic, and the reef system make it safe and comfortable for the female to give birth and nurse the young one. The number of whales in and around the extensive Tonga reefs peak by mid August through September.

Not only are the females here at this time the male humpbacks also arrive to locate a willing female, ready to mate. It is very possible that you will see what is called a “heat run” were several males are chasing one female. If she has an escort he will try to beat all others and it can be bloody, fast, loud and stunning display of power play among the male for the one female while she leads the parade. Be ready to be impressed and behold.

After an hour on the water, it seems we have found the perfect whales: a mother humpback and her young calf calmly hanging near the surface. The water is glassy, clear, and perfectly blue. The sun’s rays are reflecting up through the sea, creating a vortex of light beams shooting up from the depths. You slip quietly into the water and slowly approach the whales. You watch them and they watch you back. The baby obviously wants to get closer, but the mother hasn’t decided yet if she approves of this.
After about ten minutes of assessing you, the mother decides to let her baby venture nearer. It glides over to have a proper look, and you realize it looks a bit out of proportion. Humpbacks already have huge pectoral fins that are 1/3 the length of their body, but on this rapidly growing baby, the ratio looks exaggerated. It turns sideways to make eye contact with you, and in that moment everything else fades away. It’s just you and this curious, 20-foot baby humpback, eyes locked, floating together in a warm, tropical sea.

Time pauses and an interaction that may have lasted 30 seconds feels like 30 minutes. You’re so mesmerized that you almost forget about the camera in your hands, and remember just in time to capture a few frames before the baby turns to go back to its mother.

After a few priceless interactions like this, you begin to feel drained, not physically, but emotionally. Nevertheless, you won’t be able to get enough and will wish for sleep to pass quickly so you can return to their world as soon as possible.

This is what you have to look forward to on a BigAnimals expedition to the Kingdom of Tonga, a place where you will truly feel like royalty because of the wealth of your experience.

The humpbacks are why we come, and the peaceful, authentic vibe of Blue Lagoon is why we keep coming back. Fales are built either over or right next to the water so that you can be lulled to sleep and gently awoken by the rolling waves.

The accommodations aren’t the only spectacular part of Blue Lagoon. The food is also wonderful and our host, Feleti, is an incredible story tellers and great chef, who was actually the King’s chef for many years until 2007. Our diving vessel, the Tonga Tango, only takes five guests and one adventure leader/photographer, Amanda Cotton.

The interaction policy in Tonga is only four swimmers at the time to interact with a willing mother & calf, unless advised otherwise by the experience skipper.

Another unique feature of our expedition is that you will not be restricted to just snorkeling on the surface. We observe the restriction of no free diving to protect mother and calf while nursing. However in the right time according to the local skipper, you will be permitted to free dive down to film and photograph the whales in their element. Being able to interact with them on a more intimate level like this is ideal.

Sundays are down days, and this break will give you the chance to explore by kayak the warm, protected waters of Blue Lagoon for which the resort is named. Beautiful rooms, delicious food, great company, a spectacular view, and one of the ocean’s most charismatic giants all in one place.

This BigAnimals expedition really tops the charts and will have you booking your return trip before you even leave.

Ready for a life changing experience?

Don’t think for too long. Contact the studio immediately at info@biganimals.com
**AMANDA COTTON**

**Expedition Leader**

Amanda is a professional underwater photographer, an avid scuba diver and ocean enthusiast. Her goal is to help the general public embrace the beauty below the waves, in hopes that with awareness comes concern. Amanda runs a design / media company, A Cotton Photo Creative Works LLC, and also enjoys working with like-minded organizations that genuinely care about the planet and its inhabitants. Amanda is a member of many prestigious organizations and has received numerous photography awards with her images being featured in major publications and news sources worldwide. Amanda is a wide-angle specialist with many years of experience photographing sharks and other big marine animals, making her an ideal trip leader for the kind of diving available in Tonga.

"After watching Amo's Ted Talk I knew I had to do an adventure with him, I had to experience his passion. The Humpback whale trip blew away all expectations! Amos runs a full white glove service, from the time you leave the airport till you step into his shadow. The boat was spacious, comfortable and very organized by the ever smiling crew. Once you hit the water and become surrounded by these gentle giants and their young one, you have to make a huge effort to remember to breathe, when they look at you with their big eyes. This is not a trip to miss and it can only be led by someone like Amos. His talent with a camera is only exceeded by his passion for capturing the animals at just the right moment. I consider it a privilege to watch him work his craft."

John Abramo, Indian Harbor, FL

**BigAnimals’ Unique Services – Raising the bar of services in every adventure we operate around the world is our policy. We lead by example with an immaculate safety record for over 35 years. Each expedition is carefully scouted before offered to the public and we schedule departures only during peak season for diving and photography. Our trip leaders are selected for their professional skills in photography, focus on your safety and friendliness. For maximum encounters results and in respect to the gentle giants welfare, mother and calf nursing. We limit this expedition to only 6 guests and only up to four people at the time in the water. For good interaction, speedy reach to whales location and your comfort, we charter the best zodiac on the island the Tonga Tango. We will also present a nightly presentation about photography, so you likely to improve your results. This is truly an incredible expedition. Reserve your spot today.**
ITINERARY

DAY 1
September 2. Arrive Tonga capital city Nuku’alofa and connect with a domestic flight to Vava’u.

If you leave from the USA, you may choose to fly to Fiji and Royal Tonga Airline and Air Fiji has a direct flight to Vava’u avoiding the need to fly to the capital and use another domestic flight.

Upon arrival to Vava’u a representative of Blue Lagoon will be waiting for you at the airport for a short drive to Port. From Port you will be whisked by water taxi for about one hour reaching the outskirts of Vava’u atoll to the picturesque Blue Lagoon.

Upon arriving you will assigned to your shared accommodations. Prepare your free diving gear, go play at the lagoon and attend the dive briefing for the next days.

Blue Lagoon will be your wonderful home, to dive, eat sleep and relax for the next 11 nights and 12 days.

DAY 2-11
September 3 - 12. You will have 9 incredible days of whale watching, “soft adventure” free diving with the gentle giant - Humpback whales.

You have exclusive use of the best vessel on the island, the “Tango Tonga” Zodiac, that is fast, quiet and easy water exit and entry.

Reminder - the island is strict observer of Sunday - there is no diving operation on that day by the crew. You may prepare days prior for use of Kayaks or visiting another island. To do this consult your local dive guide.

DAY 12
September 13. After another great breakfast, the water taxi will whisk you back to the Vava’u port and by vehicle transfer to the airport to catch your departing flights.

It will be hard to say goodbye to such an amazing location and experience. History has proven that many guests will book a return trip back to this magical area.

“I have made eight trips with Amos and that speaks for itself. Swimming with humpback whales, orcas, blue whales, great white sharks and walking in the footsteps of Shackleton in Antarctica. Unparalleled intimate experiences guided by a terrifically talented man”.
Barbara Doerr, Milwaukee, WI

“I was shoulder-to-shoulder with Amos when he took the amazing photo of the 45’ long Humpback whale mother and calf, vertically in the water and my photos turned out great as well. Thanks to his coaching. there are others that claim to be able to provide the opportunity of a lifetime but few can deliver like BigAnimals Expeditions. If you have dreamed of going on an exotic, adrenaline rushing adventure, then stop dreaming, start living, and call Amos”.
Bobby Scandura, Boston, MA

PAYMENT POLICY AND DEPOSIT:
When we receive your deposit, we will send you a comprehensive and detailed Trip Preparation Bulletin about the experience and the destination. All trip costs are subject to change without prior notice until your reservation is confirmed. A deposit of 33% of the total trip price is required to secure space on the trip. Full payment is due no later than 90 days before departure. We reserve the right to sell any space that is not paid in full by 60 days before departure.

CANCELLATION POLICY
• Must be made in writing.
• More than 90 days before trip: Deposit will be refunded less administration and promotion cost.
• 90 days or less before trip: Deposit will be refunded if space is sold, less unrecoverable costs of sales, and administration costs.
• No refund is made for unused part of the itinerary.
• Cost of services not included in the expedition price, flight time and schedule, weather, water temperature, and animal behavior are all subject to change.
APPLICATION FORM

Expedition Tonga - Humpback Whales  |  Expedition Date: Sept. 2 - 13, 2017

Personal Information

First name ___________________________  Last name ___________________________

Date of birth ___________________________  Gender:  ☐ Female  ☐ Male

Address _______________________________________________________________

City ___________________________  State ______________  Zip _______________________ 

Work Phone ___________________________  Home Phone ___________________________

Email _______________________________________________________________

Citizen of ________________  Passport # ________________  Place Issued & Date _______________________

Trip price $ 8,400 per person, based on double occupancy. Deposit of 1/3 of trip price is required to secure space = $2,600 non-refundable. Final payment due 90 days before departure, June 2, 2017 or before. $___________________

☐ single supplement $2,500

Please make your check payment to biganimals expeditions, 189 Evans Ave #A, Pacific Grove, CA 93950. Overseas payment can be done via bank wire, instructions will be sent to you upon receipt of this application.

Travel insurance:  ☐ Yes  ☐ no  Provider ___________________________  Policy ___________________________

Travel insurance is prerequisite and mandatory on biganimals adventures. We need to have your policy number.

Do you carry diving insurance?  ☐ Yes  ☐ no  Provider ___________________________  Policy ___________________________

Diving experience/Years in Diving _________________________________________

Where & When last 3 Dive experiences?  1 _______________  2 _______________  3 _______________

How do you rate your Diving skills?  ☐ Beginner  ☐ Inter  ☐ Advanced  ☐ Expert

How do you rate your Photography and/or Video skills?  

☐ Bo interest  ☐ beginner  ☐ Inter  ☐ Advanced  ☐ Expert

BigAnimals.com | info@biganimals.com | 189 Evans Ave #A, Pacific Grove, CA 93950 | Phone 831.241.6657 | © AMOS NACHOUM PHOTOGRAPHY