

An extraordinary relationship between
Burmese fishermen & the Irrawaddy Dolphins

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The rare and endangered Irrawaddy River Dolphins enjoy a unique interaction and close relationship with the remote fishing villages in Northern Myanmar. For generations small pods of river dolphins have ‘tipped off’ local fishermen when it is time for them to cast their nets..!

In an extraordinary display of cooperation and communication, the dolphins either Tail (fluke) slap or Flipper (pectoral fin) slap when small bait fish are near the fisherman’s boat. This is the signal for the fisherman to cast his net and retrieve his catch of the day.



In the first instance, to alert the dolphins of the fisherman's presence, a small wooden baton is tapped on the gunnels of the shallow drafted timber boat. Soon after the dolphins approach to locate nearby bait fish. When the bait fish are within casting range, (around ten meters from the boat) the dolphins Fluke or Flipper slap and within seconds the net is cast.

In appreciation for their underwater insights, a portion of the bait fish catch is donated to the dolphins..... a truly symbiotic relationship.





Location:

Heading past the Sagaing headland and the main road heads north from Mandalay, parallel to the Irrawaddy River. After around ninety minutes and along an off-road side track and you arrive at Shain Ma Kar village. From here a timber river boat meets guests at a pre-arranged arrival time.

There are eight villages in the district that work cooperatively and share the weekly arrivals, village by village, on a roster basis.

The fishermen know instinctively where the dolphins are located daily and assure an 85% likelihood of observing the dolphins.

The two main influencing factors are the river water levels which seasonally fluctuate each month and also the sand banks; which mean only shallow hull vessels can safely navigate these areas.

Typically each period of close-up sightings and interaction lasts between 30-40 minutes. Transfer time from riverbank to location is around 45-60 minutes out and back so allow for a three hour boat excursion.

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Useful Links:

<https://myanmarbiodiversity.org/portfolio-items/irrawaddy-dolphin-conservation/>

http://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/endangered_species/cetaceans/about/irrawaddy_dolphin/

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Community Engagement policy

Our Vision

Irrawaddy Voyages believes that tourism on and around the Irrawaddy River should build a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship between travelers, businesses and the local communities. We already play an active role in providing financial benefits for local people through employment, local purchasing and delivering opportunities for our guests to support local communities. We will help to preserve the many cultures, ethnic minorities and traditions that exist along the riverbanks for future generations, as well as educate our guests about these unique characteristics. We care about the social welfare of our community and the protection of our shared natural environment.

Irrawaddy Voyages Sustainable Policies 2018

Irrawaddy Voyages offers guests a genuine nature based travel experience in a stylish and luxurious cruising environment. At all times we adopt a Safety First Policy 24/7. This applies not only to our onboard guests but to our ships crews. We pride ourselves on ensuring that every guest receives a warm and friendly welcome, a high level of comfort and excellent service. We also believe in delivering a responsible tourism experience that is environmentally friendly and gives back to the river communities. Our sustainable policies promote environmentally friendly operations that contribute to the protection of our natural and cultural heritage. We continuously strive to be a fair employer that promotes local recruitment and promotion.