

P R E S S R E L E A S E

**An Orion expedition to islands lost in time**

**Dragons, spices and megaliths**

Orion's *Spice Island Adventure* explores one of the most extraordinarily bio-diverse regions on Earth, a handful of rarely visited islands situated just north of Australia.

Centuries ago the Spice Islands were the source of the world's most valued foodstuffs, the most treasured commodities of their time. Spices enriched a chain of traders and merchants with profits beyond belief, multiplying in value perhaps a thousand-fold by the time the spices reached the markets of Europe.

Dotted among the thousands of islands that make up the Indonesian archipelago, only nine islands supported the *Myristica fragrans* tree, the source of nutmeg and mace, while just six more islands provided the right combination of soils and micro climate to support a myrtle tree whose dried flower buds were known to the Chinese as 'fragrant nails' but are best known as cloves.

More than 3000 years ago cloves were traded in Persia, and Romans were able to buy spices originating from the east of Indonesia. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Magellan and Vasco da Gama opened the way for Europeans and the trading houses of the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company. In 2011 Orion Expedition Cruises will again open the way for more adventurous (albeit these days culturally sensitive) spirits with an 11 night expedition to explore a region where few outsiders ever set foot.

Being part of Wallacea, the legendary area that separates the Australian and Asian continental plates, it is home to many unique flora and fauna species, particularly birdlife. Here towering volcanoes, many still active, rise from the depths of the sea. Tropical islands appear through the soft light of morning, a hint of kretek – aromatic clove and tobacco blended cigarettes - wafts on the breeze. Bright costumes and colourful customs bring ancient legends and traditions to life as you explore remote island villages.

This expedition includes a visit to Komodo and the chance to see the world's largest lizards. Growing to over 3 metres in length Komodo dragons are an impressive sight, and whereas they don't spit flames like those of mythical

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dragons they can be seen dribbling blood-red saliva after feeding – equally impressive.

Remote Pink Beach, so named because of crushed red organ pipe coral sand, is perfect for swimming, snorkelling or just relaxing on the beach - options available to make the most of time spent on this stunning beach.

Ashore, on the island of Alor the predominantly Christian villagers are friendly, their culture as intriguing as it is enduring, exemplified by the existence of Moko drums which can be traced back to the Dongson period in Vietnam around 350 BC.

The residents of Sumba, an uplifted coral limestone island once known as Sandalwood Island by early European traders, retain a strong cultural heritage resistant to the outside influences of Christianity, Hinduism or Islam. Orion's guests will be welcomed by Sumba villagers wearing traditional woven ikat fabrics to see imposing ancient megaliths that adorn the entrances to Sumba villages.

As on all Orion expedition voyages, the specialist Expedition Team, selected for their knowledge and practical experience in fields that include botany, marine biology, anthropology and history will share their in-depth knowledge to enhance guest experiences.

This 11 night Orion *Spice Island Adventure* has captured the imagination of Orion's Expedition Team. The heady blend of local culture, European discovery, geology, unique flora and fauna all wrapped and presented in a series of beautiful islands largely lost in time promises to be a voyage of a lifetime.

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**[Spice Islands Adventure - 14 July 2011 - 11 nights](#)**

Darwin, Kisar (Maluku), Alor, Maumere (Flores), Komodo, East and West Sumba, Savu, Rote, Darwin

**[Fares Guide:](#)**

Fares begin from \$8,175 per person for an ocean view Category B Stateroom

Suites begin from \$11,275 per person for a Junior Suite

Owners' Suites with French Balcony are \$17,120 per person

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***Ranked #2 expedition cruise ship in the world in the current Berlitz Cruise Guide, Orion is the world's latest and Australia's only purpose-built luxury expedition cruise ship.***  
***With 75 crew and a maximum of just 106 passengers Orion offers the highest staff to guest ratio and guest to public space ratio of any ship based in Australian waters.***

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