



THE WHALE SHARK CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICS

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR WHALE SHARK ENCOUNTERS

Definition of terms:

“Vessel” means any or floating structure whether or not used specifically for diving purposes.

“Licensed Vessel” means any licensed hire craft used specifically for diving or whale shark interaction purposes.

“Contact Zone” means all water within 150-metres of any whale shark.

“Swimmer” includes divers, snorkellers and any other person in the water within the contact zone.

CONTACT ZONE

1. All vessels should take care when within the contact zone to avoid physically impacting the whale shark(s) or scaring the sharks away.
2. Only one vessel may operate within the contact zone at any one time, all other vessels are to use boat power as necessary to avoid encroachment into the contact zone occupied by another vessel.
3. The first vessel within the contact zone is deemed to be “in contact” regardless of the position of any other vessel. The second vessel to arrive in the general vicinity may queue outside the Contact Zone to have access to the shark. All other vessels are to maintain a distance of 300 meters from the contacted shark or should attempt to locate another shark.
4. Licensed vessels may remain “in contact’ with the shark for a maximum of 30 minutes from the time of first entry into the water.
5. In the event that 2 or more sharks are found within 150 meters of each other the limit of the vessel “in contact’ will apply to both sharks until they separate by more than 150 meters.
6. In the event that 2 or more whale sharks with swimmers ‘in contact’ from separate vessels move to within 150 meters of each other, skippers and Dive master’s must co-operate to ensure the safety of their swimmers and the sharks.

SWIMMERS

All vessel operators must ensure that the ‘in water’ activities of swimmers comply with the following:

7. The Whale Shark should be observed for a few minutes before swimmers enter the water to determine direction of travel and behaviour of the shark. It is advised that the swim facilitator/skipper first obtains the relevant sighting data before the interaction with swimmers.
8. Swimmers must treat all whale sharks with caution and at all times recognize that while the sharks appear to be ‘Gentle Giants’ they can inflict serious injury if the strike a swimmer with tail or fins.
9. Swimmers must not touch a whale shark under any circumstances and must maintain a minimum distance of at least 3 meters from the shark.
10. Swimmers must not attempt to block a whale shark from its chosen direction of movement.
11. ‘Flash’ photography to be used with discretion.
12. The maximum number of swimmers in the water with a whale shark at any one time is limited to 10 persons.
13. Swimmers may not use dive scooters or any motorized propulsion aid to swim within the contact zone of a whale shark.

VESSELS

14. Vessels or their tenders may not approach within 30 meters of a whale shark and shall move at a slow speed (less than 5 knots) within the contact zone.
15. Vessels or their tenders approaching from ahead of a whale shark's direction of movement must drop their swimmers no less than 30 meters from the approaching shark and must move out of the path of the shark.
16. No more than 11 passengers may be carried on any Licensed Vessel and no more than 6 on any other vessel entering the Contact Zone.
17. Vessels entering the contact zone must display the Whale Shark flag to indicate that swimmers are in the water and maintain radio contact with approaching vessels to indicate that diving/swimming is in progress.
18. Vessel operators are to ensure that swimmers enter the water with the minimum of disturbance and that the swimmers do not interfere with the natural activities of the sharks.

