

Sustainable Dolphin Watching Guidelines

Direction of approach

- Boat should not approach directly behind, head on or cross the path of dolphin pod at any point.
 - Boat should approach dolphins from side and steer parallel to the direction of the group of dolphins or 45 degrees approaching from behind.
 - If dolphins are approaching the boat, (a.) smaller boats should turn off the engine, (b.) larger boats should put into neutral and wait until dolphins swim away.
 - If the dolphins are within 10-15 meters of the radius of the boat, (a.) smaller boats should turn off the engine, (b.) larger boats should put into neutral and wait until dolphins swim away.
- Do not change course or speed instantly.
- Boat should never get in between the group and the river mouth / estuary.

Speed of approach

- Speed of boat should never exceed the “no wake speed”, i.e. should be less than 7km
- Boat should always approach and depart the group of dolphins slowly and continue its normal cruising speed after the dolphins swim more than 100 away from the boat.

Engine noise

- Engine noise should be kept low at all time.
- If the operator is using an outboard engine boat, it is better to use a four-stroke rather than a two-stroke engine due to the noise level the latter produces.
- Turn off engines instead of idling, or position boat downwind to decrease noise effects for long-tail boat or outboard engine boat (speedboat).
- Captain or Pilot must be very careful, once he/she wishes to turn the engine back on again, make sure that there are no dolphins around the stern or underneath the propeller.
- Personal water craft such as jet ski and scooter should be prohibited for dolphin watching activity.

Distance

- Boat should maintain a minimum distance of 15 metres from the group.
- If the boat is not compliant with the 15-metre approach guideline, (a.) smaller boats should turn off the engine, (b.) larger boats should put into neutral and wait until dolphins swim away.
- Boat should maintain a minimum distance of 30 metres from the group if a pair mother and calf of dolphins are spotted.

Interaction time limit

- Boats should limit time with one group to a maximum 30 minutes to minimize disturbance of natural behaviour.
- Cumulative time of all dolphin-watching boats should be limited for each group.
- A maximum of three boats are allowed within 100 metres of a group at any one time.
- Only one boat is allowed within 30 meters of a group at any time. Other boats must wait outside the 30 metres radius area.
- If a second group of dolphins is spotted, it is better for another boat that is waiting in the waiting zone to approach this other group, in order to reduce the stress of the human-animal interaction.

Presence of mother and calf pairs

- Boats should be especially cautious if a mother and calf pair is sighted.
- Mother and calf should never be separated. Boat should never get in between them.
- Always use double distances with mother and calf.

Signs of agitation/stress

- If any signs of distress or agitation are observed within a group, the boat should stop pursuing it immediately and move away slowly.
- Signs of agitation or distress include, but are not limited to:
 - Vertical avoidance tactics (e.g. less time at surface, decreased resting time)
 - Increasing depth and duration of dives
 - Shift in habitat preference or use
 - Horizontal avoidance tactics (e.g. increased swimming speed, frequency of heading changes)



OTHER RESTRICTIONS

Swimming with dolphins

-No swimming with the dolphins is permitted. No persons should jump into the water with the dolphins.

Feeding and touching dolphins

-Direct contact with dolphins should never occur. No feeding or touching of the dolphins is allowed. This is for the protection of both humans and dolphins.

Temporal/seasonal restrictions

-Designate no vessel period to ensure dolphin populations have time to rest from boat pressure, noise and air pollution.

-Upon improved knowledge about the mating systems of the Irrawaddy and humpback dolphin, temporal restrictions should be developed and enforced to prevent disturbance of critical behaviours such as breeding season.

Fishing

-Fishing is not allowed during the dolphin watching activity.

Sonar and Sounder

-Sonar is not allowed to use to find dolphins. Depth sounder is only allowed for boat navigation.

Trash and rubbish

-Passengers should not be allowed to throw and trash anything into the sea.

Spatial restrictions

-Restrict the extent of dolphin watching spatially, e.g. an area within the dolphin conservation zone (based on high ecological significance – e.g. important foraging, breeding area – does not have to be large in size).

SPECIAL PERMITS

- There should be a special permit for filming / video or scientific research. Operator should always contact authority for permission if they wish to approach the animal closer and spend more time than what these guidelines indicate.

6 KEYS to be a SUCCESSFUL DOLPHIN WATCHING OPERATOR

1. – Follow the guidelines strictly.
2. – Educate and give accurate information about the dolphins they interact with.
3. – Work on marine conservation with authorities (Government or Non-Government Organization) by sharing information about sighting records or even by creating a dolphin stranding rescue network in the area.
4. – Be a good example for other operators and maintain high standards.
5. – Always look for an opportunity to learn and improve your capacity to minimize impacts on animals and the environment.
6. – Be responsible towards nature, animals, the environment, and your clients.