

# Whale Shark Tourism Interaction Guidelines

Tour guides wishing to conduct whale shark interaction tours within the Whale Shark Zone must be Whale Shark Certified and carry their **Tour Guide ID** along with their **Whale Shark ID**. Captains wishing to take boats into the Whale Shark Zone must also be Whale Shark Certified and have working knowledge of the zone as well as carry their **Captains License** along with their **Whale Shark ID**. All whale shark tours must operate from boats that are properly licensed.

1. Dive and snorkel tours should be limited to one and one half hour (1 ½) time slots and these will be allocated by lottery, for the entire whale shark season, before the March moon.
2. A maximum of six (6) dive and/or snorkel boats will be permitted inside the larger buoyed area known as the Whale Shark Zone.
3. All boats should check-in with SEA Rangers stationed inside the reef before proceeding to the Whale Shark Zone.
4. Dive and snorkel guides are required to provide briefing on regulations to tourists before entering the area.
5. No touching, chasing, or molesting whale sharks will be permitted. All boats will fly the "diver down" flag when they have divers in the water.
6. **No Flash Photography** allowed.
7. Each boat will carry a maximum of 12 clients - divers and/or snorkelers, and/or watchers.
8. For SNORKEL tours a maximum ratio of 8 snorkelers to each licensed snorkel guide is permitted.
9. For SCUBA tours, a maximum ratio of 8 divers to each licensed dive master is permitted.
10. Maximum depth for divers of any certification is 80 feet.
11. All tourists - divers, watchers and snorkelers - must pay a fee: a mandated fee of \$15US per person.
12. Divers and snorkelers should remain at least **15 feet** away in any direction from any whale shark.
13. Dive and snorkel boats must approach all whale sharks at **idle speed** (not exceeding 2 knots) and maintain idle speed in the vicinity of whale sharks.
14. Boats should remain at least 50 feet from any whale shark.
15. Dive, snorkel and fishing boats should maintain a distance of at least 200 feet between each other.
16. Entry in the water should be no later than 4:00PM and all divers and snorkelers should be out of the water by 5:00 PM and out of the reserve by 5:30 PM.

17. Whale shark fees will be applied 1 March to July 31.

**Licensing:**

1. Any person who wishes to conduct whale shark tours must have a valid tour guide license, dive master certification (for SCUBA), skin diver certification (for snorkelers) a certificate of graduation from a whale shark course. Boat captains must also attend the whale shark course.
2. Any boat used for whale shark tours must be at least 23 feet and no longer than 48 feet for the Whale Shark Season.
3. Any boat used for whale shark tours must carry oxygen, safety sausages, radio, and lights.
4. The annual fee for boat license is \$100, payable to The Fisheries Department.

**Sanctions:**

1. Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of these regulations is guilty of an offense and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding two thousand Belize dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, or to both such fine and period of imprisonment and/or revocation of whale shark license.
2. Notwithstanding the above, **anyone touching a whale shark is liable for a \$10,000BZ fine.**
3. Notwithstanding the above, any person who damages corals shall pay a fine not exceeding \$10,000BZ, or some higher penalty based on the assessed damage not exceeding \$1,000,000BZ.