

Trip Preparation Bulletin

Please take the time to review the following information to ensure that you properly prepare for your "Whales of the Silver Bank" expedition.

Where do I have to go?

Your embarkation and disembarkation point will be Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic. The vessel is located at the Ocean World Marina.

How do I make Airline Reservations?

Your gateway airports for Puerto Plata & Santiago, Dominican Republic are Miami, Newark, JFK and San Juan, P.R.

When purchasing your plane tickets, I would highly recommend calling the H2O Travel air desk in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. We will make every attempt to find you the least expensive and most direct route, to and from your destination.

We realize you have many choices to purchase your airfare, but the amount you may save, doesn't typically compensate you enough not to work with our service directly. Our airline staff is aware of your needs, providing the service and support to assure you of a timely arrival and departure. Our air desk office can be reached by calling (866) 480-3483 or (954) 577-3445. Or, you can make your request by email (larry@h2otours.com) and one of our agents will contact you with an itinerary. Trip cancellation insurance can be purchased and is highly suggested.

You will be required to purchase a visitor VISA when arriving in the Dominican Republic. This VISA can be purchased upon arrival in the Dominican Republic. The cost of the VISA is \$10. When departing the Dominican Republic by air you will have a departure tax of \$10.00. The departure tax paid when we depart by ship is included in the package. Bear in mind, this departure tax is charged all over the world, even the U.S. charges this tax, but conceals it in the price of your airline ticket when purchased in the U.S.

You must travel with a valid passport. Non U.S. citizens please check with your consulate if you need a VISA in addition to a valid passport for entry into the Dominican Republic.

If you intend to spend additional time in the Dominican Republic to scuba dive or tour the island, please let me know so I can direct you to discounted packages for our participants.

When do I need to arrive?

Boarding time is at 5PM on the day of departure. This does not mean if you arrive earlier than 5PM that we cannot accommodate your baggage and equipment. You may drop it off at the "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" while the crew is preparing the ship, enabling you to tour the area until boarding time. When departing Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic the ship will leave Ocean World Marina between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. on the day of departure.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT that you arrive no later than the departure time mentioned above. Due to the distance of the Silver Bank from the terminal port the ship must leave the day of departure. The ship will not wait for any passengers or luggage to arrive the next day. If you are concerned about making your connections on time to meet the ship, we highly suggest arriving a day earlier to assure a timely boarding of the vessel. Aquatic Adventures can arrange discounted hotel accommodations if you decide to take this option.

When do I need to depart the ship?

When departing the ship to return home, it is best to schedule your flight as early in the morning of the departure day as possible. If you are unable to schedule your flight for an early morning departure, you'll be required to have your stateroom clear and your baggage packed and stored onboard no later than 8:30AM. This will enable the crew to prepare the ship for the arriving passengers while you wait to be transported to the airport. If you do have a late departure land tours or hotel recreation areas can be arranged until you need to depart for the airport.

What do I do when I arrive?

Occasionally when clearing customs in Puerto Plata you will feel as if the customs officials are holding you for ransom, do not let them take advantage of you. Insist that you are a tourist and that all of your items are for personal use. Do not pay them any tax for the equipment you have brought with you, if they insist, ask for the supervisor, take their identification number and name and make sure all this information is on the receipt that they must give to you. When this does happen to people who come with exceptional amounts of camera equipment any fee you pay will be given back to you when you leave the country with the equipment you registered. At times custom agents are just looking for tips and it is up to you to decide if \$10.00 or \$20.00 is worth not going through the hassle. This doesn't happen all the time, I just want you to be aware that some inspectors try and take advantage of tourists when they arrive.

If you have any foreign made equipment, cameras, binoculars, tape recorders, radios, etc., I highly suggest registering them with the U.S. Customs Service before departing abroad. You can register your equipment either by visiting the Customs Office in person, or it can be done at your U.S. gateway. They will record the serial number on a validation form that you should keep with your passport. This will serve as proof that the equipment was not purchased abroad. This will assist you in entering foreign countries as well as reentering the USA. To expedite this process it's best to prepare the information before hand or carry copies of the invoices of the articles in question.

If you decide to use a porter, be firm in what you want them to do and how much you are willing to pay for their services. The amount to tip a porter is no different here than in any other airport in the world. Bear in mind that the local currency is the Dominican Peso with fluctuating exchange rate; in 2010 it was about 30 pesos to the dollar, while. After leaving the terminal look for our driver holding a sign, which reads, "Aquatic Adventures" to escort you to the ship and assist you with your luggage. Additionally, you should have small bills available for tipping the porters and cab drivers, as typically they will not have change. The cost of your taxi ride will depend upon the number of Aquatic Adventures passengers arriving on your same flight. The minimum is \$20.00 per person with a two-person minimum.

If for some reason there is no one to meet you, take a taxi to Ocean World Marina in Cofresi. It is approximately a forty-minute ride to the marina.

IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT to notify Aquatic Adventures of your arrival times to assure being met at the airport. Keep in mind; the taxi will be waiting for you at the airport, so any changes in flight must be forwarded to them prior to your arrival. In case of emergency call Holly at 954 895-5782

What should I bring?

Space is always limited aboard ships and commuter planes, so please pack your gear in soft bags for easy stowage. Clothing should be lightweight, comfortable sportswear, sweat shirts or warm up suits for those cool evenings on the decks, cotton wear for sun protection, sandals or soft-soled shoes, numerous levels of sunscreen, a wide brimmed hat, sun glasses, foul weather gear, wind breaker or jacket is recommended to keep you warm from the wind, rain and *soft-in-water* encounters.

Your snorkeling gear should consist of a comfortable mask, comfortable snorkel, comfortable pair of full foot fins and a 2mm wetsuit, lycra or darlex suit to protect you from the sun while on the tenders. Please do not bring long free diving fins.

What type of camera equipment should I bring?

You will have the opportunity to photograph every behavior known to humpback whales during this time frame. It is not necessary to bring fancy cameras or any camera at all; many passengers have utilized throwaway versions of topside and underwater cameras and have walked away with acceptable images of their experiences. Many people miss the full feel of what they're experiencing by focusing too much on capturing everything on film. Some of my best memories are digitally recorded in my mind and I play them back over and over again when I reminisce my favorite encounters.

If you do decide to bring 35 mm or larger camera equipment, I suggest the following: lenses ranging from 28 mm to 70 mm, 80 mm to 200 mm, with the maximum being 300 mm to use without a tripod. This selection of lenses should enable you to capture close up and medium distance behaviors for some great memories of your expedition. For underwater photography you will be utilizing natural light only. I suggest you bring as wide an angle lens as possible, underwater video enthusiasts should follow the same guidelines.

Please keep in mind that if you take your camera equipment on the tenders they may get wet sometime during the week. I suggest bringing a small towel to protect your camera from spray while we're maneuvering the tender during certain behaviors. The tenders do have enough room for small camera cases to store on the shelf under the splashguard. They also have splash rails to curl the spray away from the tender. This being said, spray might still become a problem.

How should I pack?

You should always carry fragile items such as cameras aboard the plane in a flight bag or small pelican case. I also recommend that you pack a change of clothing, toiletries, and swimsuit, and if possible your mask and snorkel in your carryon baggage in case of the regrettable lost baggage syndrome. The remainder of your clothing and equipment should be packed in soft bags for easy storage and remember to clearly mark all baggage with your identification information.

Should I check my baggage to my final destination?

I strongly recommend that you check your baggage only as far as the gateway city and then re-check your baggage to the final destination. This

eliminates any lost baggage when they transfer it from plane to plane. Make sure to check with your carrier to find out what the baggage allowance is from your starting point to your final destination. Sometimes it is different once you leave the country.

What type of food is on board?

The chef serves an excellent variety of wholesome meals with plenty of food at all meals. If you have a general request regarding diet, please let me know ahead of time so that I can inform the crew. We will do our best to accommodate your requests, but if you have a favorite snack I suggest that you pack it in your bags prior to departure.

Should I bring scuba diving or rebreather gear?

There is no scuba diving or rebreather use permitted on the Silver Bank without a special permit issued by the Sanctuary Commission. A *soft-in-water* encounter with the use of snorkeling equipment is the most successful means of capturing that special experience with these highly sensitive marine mammals.

Should I bring first aid equipment?

Remember that you will be far from any type of medical facilities. The "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" is well equipped to handle any type of emergency that might arise, but it is up to you to bring anything that you know may assist you in the case of any minor sickness, sea sickness or known injury. If you do forget or a situation arises the "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" is capable of handling the majority of injuries with its well-stocked first aid equipment.

How much should I tip the crew?

I'm a firm believer in compensating people for the extra effort displayed in accommodating my wants and needs. The "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" crew exemplifies the meaning of service and customer satisfaction. I suggest \$400.00 per passenger as a minimum (15% to 20% would be better) for their service. These tips are divided evenly among the Aquatic Adventures Team and "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" crew.

Two Very Important Final Notes!

As mentioned in the "More Information" packet, the "M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II" will travel on Friday during the day to your final departure destination. This assures us of getting you to your flight on time and filling the immigration requirements of the country visited. You will have Sunday through Thursday on the Silver Bank to witness the whales behaviors and 4 1/2 days of tender time.

You must fill out the application and liability release form at the time of making your deposit. Please fill these out in their entirety and return them to me immediately if you haven't done so already. The forms can be downloaded from the following link:
http://www.aquaticadventures.com/silver_bank/information.htm

We'll see you on the Silver Bank!

The Aquatic Adventures Team

Aquatic Adventures
P.O. Box 551408
Davie, FL 33355

Tel. (954) 382-0024
Fax (954) 382-0042

Web Site: www.aquaticadventures.com
E-mail: whales@aquaticadventures.com
Blog: www.aquaticadventures.com/blog