

# WHALES OF THE SILVER BANK



*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?**

You will join Aquatic Adventures aboard the M/V Turks and Caicos Explorer II, which will be docked at the Ocean World Marina. Ocean World is located just outside of Puerto Plata in Cofresi, Dominican Republic. Taxis can be hired at the airport for the journey to Ocean World Marina.

## **How do I make Airline Reservations?**

Puerto Plata (POP) is the nearest airport to our embarkation/ disembarkation point in the Dominican Republic. You may also consider flying into Santiago (STI), DR. Your gateway airports for Puerto Plata & Santiago are Miami, Newark, JFK and San Juan (Puerto Rico). You will be required to purchase a visitor visa (\$10) when arriving in the Dominican Republic. When departing the Dominican Republic by air you will be charged a departure tax (\$10). The departure tax paid when we depart by ship is included in the package. You must travel with a valid passport. Non U.S. citizens please check with your consulate if you need additional documentation in addition to a valid passport for entry into the Dominican Republic.

If you require assistance with your airline reservation, we recommend calling H2O Travel in Ft. Lauderdale, FL (\$25 service charge). They will make every attempt to find you the least expensive and most direct route to and from the Dominican Republic. They are also aware of AA's timing restraints and can provide you an appropriate schedule for arrival and departure. H2O Travel can be reached at p: (866) 480-3483 or (954) 577-3445. You can also make your requests via email: [larry@h2otours.net](mailto:larry@h2otours.net). Trip cancellation insurance is highly suggested and can be purchased through H2O travel or online.

### **When do I need to arrive?**

Boarding time is 5PM on the day of departure. If you arrive earlier than 5 PM, the marina can accommodate your baggage and equipment while you explore the area. Departure for the Silver Bank is at 10 PM. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT that you arrive no later than 7 PM. The ship is unable to wait for passengers or luggage arriving late. If you are concerned about making your connections on time to meet the ship, we highly suggest arriving a day early to assure timely boarding of the vessel (see 'What if I want to arrive early to the DR, or stay longer?' below).

### **When do I need to depart the ship?**

When departing the ship to return home, it is best to schedule your flight as early as possible on your departure day; you'll be required to be off the boat by 8:30 AM. If you are unable to schedule a morning flight, land tours or time at hotel recreation areas can be arranged prior to departure.

### **What if I want to arrive early to the DR, or stay longer?**

If you are considering an early arrival to the Dominican Republic, or an extended stay, Aquatic Adventures can make suggestions for local hotels. Lifestyles Holidays Vacation Resort (\$85-\$100 per person, all inclusive) is one safe, comfortable and affordable option. For a more upscale stay, Casa Colonial (\$300-\$500 per room) is an excellent choice.

### **What do I do when I arrive?**

If you intend to bring large quantities of foreign made equipment (such as cameras, binoculars, tape recorders, radios, etc), we highly suggest registering them with the U.S. Customs Service before departure abroad. You can register your equipment by visiting the Customs Office in person,

or it can be done at your U.S. gateway. Agents will record the serial number(s) for your item(s) on a validation form that you should keep with your passport. This will serve as proof that the equipment was not purchased abroad, and will assist you in entering foreign countries and reentering the USA. To expedite this process it's best to prepare the information beforehand or carry copies of the invoices for the articles in question.

When clearing customs in Puerto Plata you should not have to pay tax for any equipment you have brought with you. If customs officers insist on charging a fee, ask for the supervisor, take their identification number and name, and make sure all this information is on the receipt that they give you. In the past when a fee has been collected from people arriving with exceptional amounts of camera equipment, they have been refunded when they leave the country with the registered equipment they brought.

If you decide to use an airport 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 in the DR than in any other airport in the world. Bear in mind that the local currency is the Dominican Peso with fluctuating exchange rate; currently 1 USD is 48 pesos. Small bills are useful for tipping porters, as they are unlikely to have change.

You will need to make your own way to Ocean World Marina from either Puerto Plata (taxi \$55) or Santiago (taxi \$120) airports. If you prefer to book ground transportation from either airport in advance, please contact our personal driver Tony Peralta at (809) 964-0119, (829) 520-9918 or Hola Tours for rates and availability (advance credit card payment will be required for Santiago transfers):

(809) 552-1223

[agoffaux@holatours.com](mailto:agoffaux@holatours.com)

### **What should I bring?**

Dress on board the Turks & Caicos Explorer II is casual, and lightweight cotton sportswear or similar is appropriate for day and evening. Do bring a sweater or sweatshirt for cooler evenings. Although rain is infrequent, it is always possible, and a rain jacket is also advised. We recommend a wide brimmed hat, sunglasses, and plenty of high SPF sunscreen for full days in the sun.

You will need to bring your own mask (**full face snorkel masks are NOT permitted**), fins and snorkel with you to the Silver Bank. You may also want to consider a lightweight (2 to 3mm) wetsuit for warmth (water temperature averages 78 degrees) and sun protection. If you do not own a wetsuit, you may be able to rent one inexpensively at your local dive shop or on board the T&C Explorer II. For gear purchases, we recommend Diver's Direct for price and selection:

<http://www.diversdirect.com>

### **What type of camera equipment should I bring?**

You will have ample opportunity for photographing humpback whales on the Silver Bank; an expensive camera setup is not necessary for good pictures. Many people find that a GoPro (or similar) allows for acceptable shots, while preserving the experience. If you do bring an SLR setup, we suggest lenses ranging from 16mm to 105mm and 100mm to 400mm for topside action, and as wide angle a lens as possible for underwater shots (11-24 mm, 16-35mm). Underwater strobes are not permitted. If you are bringing large amounts of camera gear into the Dominican Republic, you may want to consider registering your equipment with the US Customs Office.

Please keep in mind that camera equipment taken onto the tenders is at risk of getting wet. We suggest bringing a small towel to protect your camera from spray. The tenders do have storage room for cameras and small camera cases on the shelf under the splashguard.

### **How should I pack?**

You should always carry fragile items such as cameras aboard the plane in a flight bag or small pelican case. We 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 lost baggage. 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?**

We recommend that you check your baggage only as far as the gateway city and then re-check your baggage to the final destination. This minimizes the risk for lost baggage during plane transfers. Make sure to check with your carrier to find out what the baggage allowance is from your starting point to your final destination.

### **What type of food is on board?**

The chef serves an excellent variety of wholesome meal options, made from fresh, locally sourced ingredients. If you have special requirements regarding diet, please let us know ahead of time so that we can inform the crew. They will do their best to accommodate your needs, but if you have a favorite snack we suggest that you bring it with you.

### **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 intelligent marine mammals.

### **What about medical emergencies?**

Remember that you will be far from any type of medical facilities. The M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II is well equipped to handle emergencies that might arise, but it is up to you to bring anything that you know may assist you in the case of minor sickness, sea sickness or known injury. Please also remember to bring adequate supplies of any prescription medication you may require, as well as an extra pair of eyeglasses (if required).

### **How much should I tip the crew?**

We are firm believers in compensating people for their extra efforts. The Aquatic Adventures Team and M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II crew strive to exemplify outstanding customer service. We suggest gratuity of 15%-20% of the trip cost, but of course this depends on your overall satisfaction with the service provided by the crew. Tips are divided evenly among the Aquatic Adventures Team and M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II crew.

## **What if I have questions, and what is the emergency contact?**

If you have questions or concerns before the trip, or experience an emergency before or during travel, please don't hesitate to contact us via

email: [whales@aquaticadventures.com](mailto:whales@aquaticadventures.com)

or phone: (954) 382-0024

To reach us directly in the Dominican Republic after January 25th, every weekend late Friday through late Saturday: (954) 494-4227

After January 25th, late Saturday to Thursday afternoon: please send us a free satellite message at the link below and we will respond as soon as we are able.

<https://www.aquaticadventures.com/send-satellite-message>

## **Any important final thoughts?**

Yes! Please remember that the Port & Fuel Surcharge (\$350) must be paid on board in cash. Cash is generally preferred at local restaurants, as well as for gratuity to crew (suggested 15-20% of expedition cost). Cash is required for taxi services, airport porters, etc. US dollars are widely accepted, though you may keep in mind that using pesos gives you a better rate. At time of writing, 1 USD = 48 Dominican pesos.

See you on the Silver Bank!

The Aquatic Adventures Team

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