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Dolphin SMART Businesses Protect Dolphins

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Wild dolphins are energetic creatures and tourists want to get a closer glimpse into their world. With the ever-growing popularity of dolphin viewing, more vacation spots feature viewing tours. However, before you choose one, consider some key points. You can help protect and enjoy watching dolphins by becoming Dolphin SMART.

Protecting Dolphins

Coastal dolphins can be disturbed by boats and people. The [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#), which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, protects dolphins from any form of harassment that can disturb their natural behaviors. Dolphins depend on their coastal homes for protection from predators, to care for their young, and to hunt for food.

People and boats disrupt and prevent dolphins from accomplishing these important survival behaviors. In extreme cases, frequent, repeat disturbance to dolphins will cause them to move away from humans to other bay areas, which may be less optimal for their survival. This is not only bad for the dolphins, but for the local tourism businesses. In some coastal towns, specifically in the Southeast United States and Hawaii, a sizable portion of the economy depends on dolphin-viewing business.

Protecting dolphins and their coastal homes is crucial for conservation efforts and economic sustainability of dolphin-viewing businesses.

What is Dolphin SMART?

Dolphin SMART is a one-of-a-kind program that combines responsible viewing and advertising practices, educational trainings and materials, field research, and outreach to benefit both dolphins and participating dolphin-viewing businesses. The program started in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 2007 from heightened dolphin viewing and boating activity in a small area. This grass-roots voluntary program was developed in a pay-it-forward style—dolphin-viewing businesses participated and received a number of incentives, including training, press releases, educational and marketing materials, and an enhanced tour experience for their customers. All of these incentives led to increased bookings. The businesses educate their guests on how to responsibly view dolphins and practicing the same things on their own tours, which minimizes disturbance to animals.

Program Reach

Since the original Dolphin SMART program started in 2007, the program has expanded nationally and now includes operators in Orange Beach, Alabama, along the southwest Florida coast, and in the Hawaiian Islands. From bottlenose dolphins in the Southeast to spinner dolphins in Hawaii, these coastal dolphin species face similar challenges of balancing the constant threat of disturbance from boats and people, while also engaging in the behaviors necessary for survival.

Choosing Dolphin SMART tours helps support businesses that have made a commitment to helping protect dolphins. These tours allow guests from Florida to Hawaii to responsibly view the natural, fascinating behavior of wild dolphins.

When booking a wild dolphin viewing tour, “Look before you book!” Remember:

- Seek businesses with the Dolphin SMART logo and current year on boat decals, flags, and businesses advertisements.
- If Dolphin SMART is not yet in the area, recall the cornerstones of the program when choosing a tour: responsible viewing and advertising.

For more information or to find a Dolphin SMART business



Bottlenose dolphin feeding off of Key West, Florida. Photo Credit: Dolphin Ecology Project



Stay back 50 yards away from dolphins

Move away cautiously if dolphins show signs of disturbance

Always put your engine in neutral when dolphins are near

Refrain from feeding, touching, or swimming with wild dolphins

Teach others to be Dolphin Smart

Click the image below to find out more about this year's 40th anniversary of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



www.dolphinmart.org



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