

Dolphin SMART Program Charter Companies Pledge to Follow Guidelines

NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA Fisheries Service and their partners have accepted the fourth charter operator into a program created to help protect wild dolphins in the Keys. Sea Bear Aquatic Adventures joined the Dolphin SMART program after successfully meeting standards that promote responsible viewing of dolphins in the wild. They join previous charter operators Key West Eco-tours, Dolphin Safari Charters and Sunny Days Catamarans.



"We are pleased to welcome Sea Bear Aquatic Adventures as the newest Dolphin SMART operator," said Cmdr. Dave Score, sanctuary superintendent. "The Dolphin SMART program highlights tour operators who promote responsible and sustainable viewing of wild dolphins, ensuring their health and well-being for future generations."

The Dolphin SMART program was developed by the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, NOAA Fisheries' Protected Resources Program, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and Dolphin Ecology Project. The project is funded by NOAA Fisheries and the "Protect Wild Dolphins" license plate funds through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The acronym "SMART" is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins,
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins,
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

The continuing success of our Dolphin SMART program is very gratifying," said Stacey Horstman, NOAA Fisheries' bottlenose dolphin conservation coordinator. "Safeguarding the local population of wild dolphins requires a community-based approach involving all our various stakeholders, and we greatly appreciate the commitment Dolphin SMART operators are making to help protect the dolphins for future generations."

Dolphin SMART-approved charters receive flags and stickers and permission to use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising. Each

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year, participants are evaluated to ensure they continue to meet program standards. By looking for the current year on flags and logos and checking the updated participant list, visitors to the Florida Keys seeking the thrill of seeing dolphins in the wild can ensure the tour operator they select is Dolphin SMART.

For more information, visit the website: www.dolphinmart.org or contact program coordinator Megan Harber at (305) 809-4700. Visit these charter operators online: Key West Eco-tours, www.keywestkayak.com; Dolphin Safari Charters, www.safaricharters.com; Sunny Days Catamarans, www.sunnydayskeywest.com; Sea Bear Aquatic Adventures, www.seabearkeywest.com.

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