

Maldivian Whale Shark Tourist Encounter Guidelines

5th June 2009

1. Restriction on vessels in or near contact zone:

- a. An exclusive contact zone of a 250 metres (820.2 feet) radius applies around any whale shark.
- b. A vessel establishing a contact zone should identify itself by raising the designated flag.
- c. Any other vessel engaging in whale shark related activities must not enter a contact zone to observe a whale shark.
- d. The operator of a vessel establishing a contact zone shall record the details of the contact on the form provided and return this to the appropriate authority within the time specified.

2. Restrictions on period in contact zone:

- a. A contact vessel must not remain in the same contact zone for longer than 40 minutes if there are other vessels queuing to view the shark.
- b. Notwithstanding clause 2 (1) above, the contact period is deemed as having ended once the contact vessel has lost contact with the shark and should lower the contact flag indicating that the contact zone and contact period have lapsed.

3. Restrictions on vessel speed in contact zone:

- a. Subject to clause (2 & 3) below, a contact vessel must not exceed 5 knots (9.3km/hr) in a contact zone.
- b. A contact vessel must not exceed 2 knots (3.7 km/hr) within 50 metres (164 feet) of the contact whale shark.
- c. If, for reasons of safety, a contact vessel must exceed 5 knots (9.3km/hr) in a contact zone, that vessel must leave the contact zone as soon as is practicable.

4. Proximity of contact vessel to the whale shark:

- a. A contact vessel must maintain a distance of at least 10 m (32.8feet) from the nearest whale shark.
- b. Should a whale shark swim towards the vessel to within 10 m (32.8 feet), all engines should be in neutral or switched off until the shark has moved more than 10 m away from it.

5. Direction of approach:

- a. Subject to clause 3 (1 & 2) if swimmers or divers are to enter the sea from a contact vessel to view a whale shark, the contact vessel should wherever possible approach a whale shark from in-front or from the side without the vessel forcing the shark to change direction.

6. Number of swimmers or divers:

- a. The number of swimmers or divers entering the sea from a contact vessel to view a shark is limited to a maximum of 12 persons in total.

7. Physical contact with whale shark prohibited:

- a. A person must not touch or ride on, or attempt to touch or ride on, a whale shark under any circumstance.

8. Proximity of swimmers or divers to the whale shark:

- a. A person in the sea must
 - i. at all times maintain a distance of at least:
 - ii. 3 metres (9.84 feet) from the head or body of the whale shark, when approaching a whale shark from any direction; and
 - iii. 4 metres (13.1 feet) from the tail of the whale shark, when approaching the tail from any direction.
- b. Must not deliberately cross in front of the whale shark's direction of travel or impede its movement.

9. Motorized swimming and other activities prohibited:

- A person in the sea must not:
- a. use a motorized or otherwise powered swimming or diving aid in a contact zone.
 - b. use any device capable of towing or carrying a person, that is towed behind a vessel, in a contact zone.
 - c. use flash photography

10. Exceptions when authorized by the authorised Government Agencies:

- a. Clauses 5, 7, 8 and 9 do not apply to a person who is undertaking authorized scientific research. Authorized scientific teams should also adhere to their allocated timings provided in the permits and should collect their deployed equipments prior to leaving the MPA.

Appendix 2. Graphical Summary of Maldivian Whale Shark Encounter Policy

