



## CHEESEMANS' ECOLOGY SAFARIS

2059 Camden Ave. #419  
San Jose, CA 95124 USA  
(800) 527-5330 (408) 741-5330  
info@cheesemans.com  
cheesemans.com

### Snorkel with Humpback Whales

*On the Silver Bank, Dominican Republic*

March 18 to 25, 2023



Watching a Humpback Whale  
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

## SAFARI OVERVIEW

---

In the warm waters of the Dominican Republic, the world's largest concentration of humpback whales converges to calve and mate on the Silver Bank. This time of year is peak breeding season which will provide you with once-in-a-lifetime experiences of both in-water encounters and whale watching. Witness males vying for the coveted "escort" role and hear them sing their famous songs. Slip into the water to see curious and playful calves follow their mothers to nurse, socialize, and learn. Renowned whale researcher Ted Cheeseman will share his extensive knowledge of the behaviors, anatomy, and temperaments of the North Atlantic humpback whales. When the weather cooperates, and it normally does this time of year, you'll get close-up photos of surface activity like breaching, flipper-slapping, and competitive interactions. Don't miss coming eye-to-eye with whales during soft in-water encounters! Nothing compares to sharing the water with a whale!

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Swim alongside humpback whales, including docile mother-and-calf pairs whose curiosity will bring you eye-to-eye with one of the world's largest mammals, for a truly unforgettable experience.
- Take advantage of many opportunities to photograph the intricacies of whale behavior while learning how to interpret these behaviors from our expert leader and staff.
- Discover the Silver Bank, an important whale calving and breeding site within the Sanctuary for the Marine Mammals of the Dominican Republic, during five total days of whale interaction which is a half a day longer than other trips.

**LEADER:** Ted Cheeseman.

**DAYS:** 8, including estimated travel time. 7 nights aboard the *Turks and Caicos Explorer II*.

**GROUP SIZE:** 19.

**SHIP:** The *Turks and Caicos Explorer II*, a 20-passenger ship. See the *Ship* section on page 3.

**COST:** \$5,520 to \$6,020 per person, depending on cabin type and occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 4.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Mar 18	Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. Board ship in the late afternoon.	<i>Turks and Caicos Explorer II</i>	D
Mar 19	Afternoon of in-water, up close whale interaction.		B, L, D
Mar 20–23	Four full days of soft in-water encounters and learning about whale behavior, anatomy, conservation, and individual personalities.		
Mar 24	Morning in-water whale encounters. Whale watching en route to Puerto Plata.		
Mar 25	Disembark after breakfast and fly home.		B

## LEADER

---



### **Ted Cheeseman**

Ted grew up traveling extensively and began studying and photographing wildlife as a child. After completing a Master's degree in Tropical Conservation Biology at Duke University, Ted returned to California to lead and organize expeditions full time with Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris. Ted currently leads expeditions to Antarctica, the Arctic, and the Caribbean and recently founded the citizen science project Happywhale.

## SHIP

---



### **The Turks and Caicos Explorer II**

The 124-ft *Turks and Caicos Explorer II* will be your home during the trip, and with two tenders it provides the best platform for whale watching on the Silver Bank. We'll anchor in a spot on the reef and venture out by tender to share our days with the humpbacks. Our crew of certified Dive Masters is committed to keeping the ship a trouble-free adventure during your stay. Enjoy your meals in the air-conditioned salon with ocean views. Share happy hours on the sundeck,

green-flash sunsets, and starlit nights. Experience the Silver Bank in individually controlled air-conditioned double cabins with private bathrooms with your own gear storage and wet suit rack. See *Deck Plan* on page 9.

Our two tenders are the keys to our intimate whale encounters. The 25-ft long fiberglass tenders are equipped with twin, fuel-efficient four stroke engines. These permit us to quietly approach whales for soft in-water encounters with virtually no exhaust fumes and the ability to double our traveling range to reach the best areas on the bank.

Each tender carries nine guests with plenty of bench space for your comfort, bow storage to protect your camera gear, individual foot storage for your wet gear, bimini tops to protect you from the sun, heavy duty boarding ladders, first aid kits, VHF radios, GPS navigation, and plenty of snacks, fruit, and beverages to hydrate and energize you throughout the day. Experience the best platforms for topside photography available on the Silver Bank.



## DETAILED ITINERARY

---

### **Mar 18 ~ Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic and embark on the ship**

Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic by mid-afternoon and transfer to the *Turks and Caicos Explorer II*. You'll navigate to the mooring site while you sleep in your comfortable cabin for the night.

### **Mar 19 ~ Arrive on the Silver Bank**

After breakfast you'll be briefed about soft in-water encounters, a profound experience for all, and prepare for a full afternoon on the two tenders.

### **Mar 20–23 ~ Enter the whales' world**

The numerous female humpback whales that choose the Silver Bank as their nursery for their newborn calves are usually nestled in the northeast corner of the Silver Bank, a relatively shallow area protected by coral heads. Although coral heads encompass the entire Silver Bank, the northeast corner has extensive coral that breaks the surface during low tides, giving protection to newborn calves (and you!).

You may have some “whale waiting” time while looking for cooperative humpback whales, but that time is quickly forgotten when you are amidst surface activity and soft in-water encounters. Most of the time you will find whale activity nearby. In fact, you will more often ask, “Which whale should we watch?” rather than, “Where are the whales?” The biggest obstacle to success is spending too much time with uncooperative whales, so be prepared to leave one group in search for more cooperative ones; be patient as you may approach many whales before finding an interested group that allows us to join them in their element and on their terms.

**Mar 24 ~ Morning whale watching, then return to Puerto Plata**

You will spend the morning on the tenders then return to the ship for lunch. Sail back to Puerto Plata through the banks, watching for more whale, and possibly dolphin, activity from the ship deck while bidding farewell to the world of these docile creatures. You will arrive in Puerto Plata in the late evening for your last night on board.



Watching a Humpback Whale  
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

**Mar 25 ~ Disembark and fly home**

Disembark in the morning and transfer to the airport for your flights home.

**COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)**

**Costs and Cabin Options**

Type	Description (See Deck Plan on page 9)	Cost per Person
Lower Deck	Double occupancy, twin-sized upper and lower beds, porthole window, cabins 8, 9, 10.	\$5,520
Main Deck	Double occupancy, two lower twin-sized beds, desk, chair, large windows, cabins 3, 4.	\$5,720
Main Deck	Double occupancy, queen-sized bed or two lower twin-sized beds, desk, chair, large window, cabins 5, 6, 7.	\$5,720
Upper Deck	Double occupancy, one queen-sized bed, TV, desk, chair, large window, cabins 1, 2.	\$6,020

Costs are per person depending on cabin type and occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

If you are a single traveler, we will find a roommate for you, but if we cannot find you a roommate, we will not charge you a single supplement. If space is available, some cabins can be booked as a single by adding **90%** over the listed cabin cost.

We cannot guarantee a specific cabin number, but if changes occur, we will assign a cabin of equal or greater value.

### Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$500
Second Payment	April 1, 2022	\$2,000
Final Payment	October 1, 2022	Remaining balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space.

### Cancellations

Refunds are given depending on the time left before departure according to the following table. The cancellation fee of \$300 per person can be applied toward another trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable.

Dates	Forfeited Amount per Person
On or before July 31, 2022	\$300
August 1 to August 31, 2022	10% of trip cost
September 1 to September 30, 2022	40% of trip cost
On or after October 1, 2022	100% of trip cost

### Included

- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, landing fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Transfers to the ship from your hotel or the Puerto Plata airport (POP) on March 18 and directly from the ship to the Puerto Plata airport (POP) on March 25.
- Seven nights on board the *Turks and Caicos Explorer II*.
- Meals from dinner on March 18 through breakfast on March 25.
- Snacks, coffee, tea, juices, soda, beer, wine, and spirits aboard the ship.
- Cruising and port fees.
- Onboard lectures in the evenings.
- Trip Materials – information about flights, packing, entry and departure requirements, airport transfers, gratuities, etc.

### Not Included

- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Round-trip airfare is approximately \$600 to \$1,000 between the US and Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, depending on origin.
- Wetsuit and snorkeling gear (mask, snorkel, and snorkel fins). We will send you more details about rentals in the Trip Materials.
- We can arrange divergent airport transfers and extra hotel nights for an extra cost.
- Gratuities - tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting \$50 to \$100 per participant per day for March 19 to March 24 aboard the ship (about \$300 to \$600 total per

participant), to be distributed among all the ship crew. Our leader, Ted Cheeseman, and local operator, Tom Conlin, do not receive a gratuity.

- Tips for porters and cab drivers for all transfers.
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance and trip cancellation insurance. For more information see [www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance](http://www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance).
- Items of a personal nature such as equipment rental, laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Reservation Form.

## SIGN UP

---

Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Reservation Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

Email: [info@cheesemans.com](mailto:info@cheesemans.com)

Website: [www.cheesemans.com](http://www.cheesemans.com)

WhatsApp: (408) 741-5330 | Skype: CheesemansEcologySafaris

Phone: (800) 527-5330 or (408) 741-5330

## OTHER DETAILS

---

### Climate

The Silver Bank is typically 75 to 80°F (24 to 27°C) during the day and cool enough in the morning/evenings to wear a sweatshirt or light fleece. The water temperature is usually 76 to 78°F (24 to 26°C). On a typical day, winds blow from the north to southeast about 15 knots (17mph), ranging from 0 to 25 knots; the coral formations throughout the Silver Bank provide protection from the wind and sea conditions, and February–March is the least windy time of the whale season and rain is infrequent. The crossing to and from the Silver Bank is usually calm, but we can encounter rough sea conditions. At the mooring area, you may hardly notice the ship moving, depending on the sea conditions. Because we are about 80mi offshore from the Dominican Republic on an ocean frontier, sea conditions are subjected to Mother Nature's many moods.

### Fitness Level and Snorkeling Experience

Minimal fitness is required to join this whale trip, but your fitness and snorkeling ability enrich the experience. Getting in the water is not required; we've shared this trip with travelers who had wonderful experiences whale watching from the tenders. At minimum you need to comfortably and safely move around the ship and embark / disembark from the whale watching tenders. To get the most out of this trip you should be comfortable in the water, snorkeling, and getting in and out of the water via a boat ladder. Please contact us if you don't have experience snorkeling but would like to join this trip. Strong swimming ability and the ability to free dive (i.e., diving underwater without scuba tanks) are not required, but will also enrich your experience, especially if you can dive to hear whales sing.

### Seasickness

Don't let a fear of seasickness scare you away! Our vessel is moored in calm water for the duration of the week, and rarely does someone get seasick while in the tenders we watch whales from daily. The voyages to and from the Silver Bank are usually the only time motion-sensitive travelers may have issues, and our

voyage out is during the evening, so most sleep through it. Although you will eventually acquire your "sea legs", bring seasickness medication. As with all medications, do your own research and consult with your doctor before taking any drugs (even if they are over-the-counter) and especially if you are taking other drugs. Read our suggestions for coping with seasickness at [www.cheesemans.com/seasickness](http://www.cheesemans.com/seasickness) and contact us if you have any concerns.

### **Flights**

Airfare is not included in trip costs. Detailed logistical information and the contact information for our recommended flight-ticketing agent are included in the Trip Materials we will send you. Please let us know if you are arriving earlier or staying later as we are happy to assist you with any extra overnights that you might want to arrange.

Flights you (or a travel agent) book: We suggest arriving in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (POP) a day early on March 17, but no later than mid-afternoon on March 18. Depart from Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (POP) anytime on March 25.

### **Terms and Conditions**

Read our current Terms and Conditions at <https://cheesemans.com/terms-and-conditions>.

### **Conservation**

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris is passionate about conserving the precious regions that we travel to and supports many conservation efforts. By visiting these areas, we contribute to sustainable conservation of these valuable wildlife habitats. We urge you to support conservation organizations that protect and restore natural habitats and write letters to tourism and government agencies to promote work in preserving wildlife.

We aim to make all our trips carbon neutral by splitting the cost of carbon offsetting with our participants. For your convenience, the optional donation amount for your half of the carbon offset will be indicated on your invoice. We source high quality offsets through CarbonTree Conservation Fund, a non-profit we helped found, supporting pioneering forest conservation in the Rio Bravo Reserve in Belize, a Nature Conservancy project ([www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/belize/rio-bravo-conservation-area/](http://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/belize/rio-bravo-conservation-area/)).

## **FAQS**

---

### **What is the Silver Bank?**

The Silver Bank is located about 80mi north of the Dominican Republic and 100mi southeast of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and it's one of the most important breeding and calving grounds for humpback whales in the North Atlantic Ocean. At least 5,000 humpbacks use the Silver Bank from January through early April each year. The Silver Bank Sanctuary, established in 1986, is approximately 200 sq mi (about the area of San Francisco city and county), and now part of the larger Sanctuary for the Marine Mammals of the Dominican Republic.

Water visibility on the Silver Bank varies daily, but averages from 40 to 60ft around the mooring area with occasional particles suspended in the water. The wind, swells, and slight current cause run-off from the coral which determines the amount of visibility. As a whole, the Silver Bank has patchy visibility. The average

water depth is approximately 80–90ft. Wind can impede whale watching, so weather will dictate the quality of activity with the whales.

**What is a soft in-water encounter?**

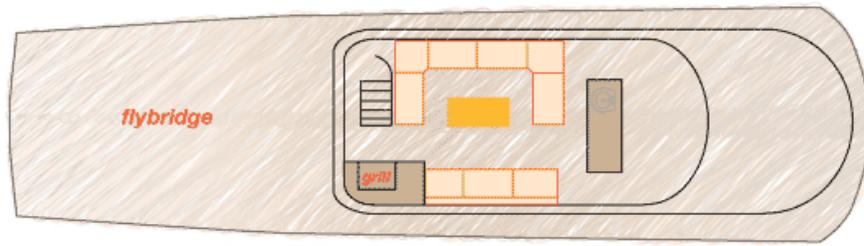
A soft in-water encounter is passive, non-aggressive floating at the surface, in mask, fins, and snorkel, allowing the humpback whales to develop an interest in you. The key is to find a cooperative, tolerant, or curious whale to meet in the water calmly and peacefully on its terms, to experience a rare and treasured encounter between you and that individual. With hundreds of voyages under their belt, our guides can interpret the behaviors of the humpbacks and tell us how to react to them above and below the water. Following instructions is key to successful interactions.

**What is a typical day like on the trip?**

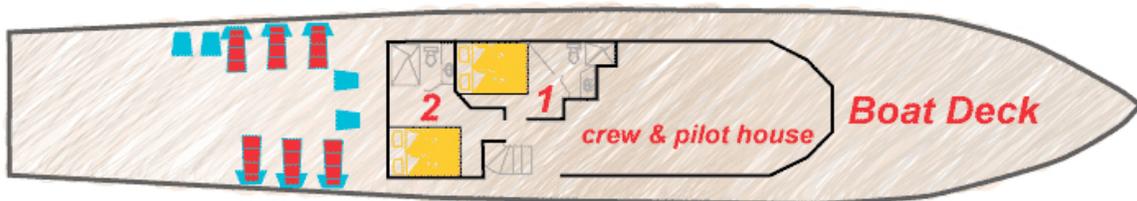
Each morning you depart on two well-stocked rotating tenders for full days of whale observations both above and below water. Activity on the Silver Bank runs in cycles, so you'll have slack periods that vary from day to day. Typically, you return to the ship for lunch but if you experience extraordinary activity, expect to eat lunch on the tenders. If you return to the ship for lunch, you will go back out for the afternoon action, returning to the ship in time for dinner.

## TURKS AND CAICOS EXPLORER II DECK PLAN

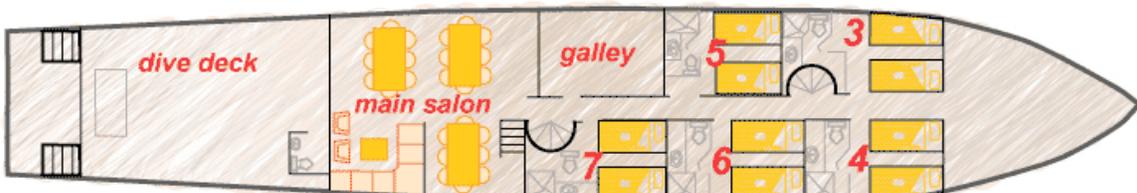
---



*Flybridge with covered seating area, wetbar, and grill*



*Boat Deck with open sun deck and two VIP staterooms*



*Main Deck with dive deck, lounge, dining room, and cabins 3 - 7*



*Lower Deck accessed via a circular staircase, and cabins 8 - 10*

Deck plan and cabin sizes are not to scale.  
See cabin descriptions under the Costs section on page 4.