



CHEESEMANS' ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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Snorkel with Humpback Whales *On the Silver Bank, Dominican Republic* March 16 to 23, 2024



Humpbacks
© Scott Davis

SAFARI OVERVIEW

In the warm waters of the Dominican Republic, the world's largest concentration of humpback whales converges to mate and calve 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. This trip benefits from our partnership with the [Oceanic Society](#), a pioneer nonprofit in ecotravel and conservation. 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 encourages interaction with one of the world’s largest mammals, 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-day longer than other trips.

LEADER: Scott Davis

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 2.

COST: \$6,365 to \$6,865 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 16	Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, board the ship, and navigate to the Silver Bank.	On board the <i>Turks and Caicos Explorer II</i>	D
Mar 17	Afternoon of in-water, up-close whale interaction.		B, L, D
Mar 18–21	Enter the whales’ world during four full days of soft in-water encounters. Learn about whale behavior, anatomy, conservation, and individual personalities.		
Mar 22	Morning of in-water whale encounters. Whale watching en route back to Puerto Plata.		
Mar 23	Disembark after breakfast and fly home.		B

LEADER



Scott Davis

Scott is a professional photographer (www.scottdavisimages.com/) specializing in wildlife, nature, and travel. Originally trained as a wildlife and marine biologist, his research and photo assignments took him to the far corners of the globe. National Geographic, BBC, Animal Planet, and renowned magazines have used his photography. His patience for teaching and love of capturing the essence of his subjects make him one of our most popular tour leaders.

SHIP



The Turks and Caicos Explorer II

Our 124-ft ship will be your home during the trip, and with two tenders, it provides the best platform for whale watching on the Silver Bank. You'll anchor on the reef and venture out by tender to share your days with the humpbacks. Our crew of certified Dive Masters is committed to keeping your experience on 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 and your own gear storage and wet suit rack on the back deck. See *Deck Plan* on page 8.

Our two tenders are the keys to your intimate whale encounters and the best platforms for topside photography available on the Silver Bank. 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 to double our traveling range to reach the best areas on the Silver 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 and beverages to hydrate and energize you throughout the day.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Mar 16 ~ Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, and board 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 spend the night in your comfortable cabin.

Mar 17 ~ 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 18–21 ~ 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!).



Humpback and Snorkelers
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

You may have some “whale-waiting” time while looking for cooperative humpback whales, but that time is quickly forgotten when you are amid 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 of 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 22 ~ Morning whale encounters, then navigate back to Puerto Plata

You will spend the morning on the tenders then return to the ship for lunch. Navigate back to Puerto Plata through the banks, watching for whale and 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.

Mar 23 ~ 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 <i>Deck Plan</i> on page 8)	Cost per Person
Lower Deck	Double occupancy, twin-sized upper and lower beds, porthole window. Cabins 8, 9, and 10.	\$6,365
Main Deck	Double occupancy, two lower twin-sized beds, desk, chair, large windows. Cabins 3 and 4.	\$6,565
Main Deck	Double occupancy, one queen-sized bed or two twin-sized beds, desk, chair, large window. Cabins 5, 6, and 7.	\$6,565
Upper Deck	Double occupancy, one queen-sized bed, TV, desk, chair, large window. Cabins 1 and 2.	\$6,865

Costs are per person, depending on cabin type, double 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 a roommate for you, 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	\$1,000
Final	October 8, 2023	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. Through August 7, 2023, 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 August 7, 2023	\$300 (see terms above)
August 8 to September 7, 2023	10% of trip cost
September 8 to October 7, 2023	40% of trip cost
On or after October 8, 2023	100% of trip cost

Included

- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, cruising and port fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Transfers to the ship from your hotel or the Puerto Plata Airport on March 16 and directly from the ship to the Puerto Plata Airport on March 23.
- Seven nights on board the *Turks and Caicos Explorer II*.
- Meals from dinner on March 16 through breakfast on March 23.
- Snacks, coffee, tea, juices, soda, beer, wine, and spirits aboard the ship.
- Onboard lectures in the evenings.
- Trip Planning 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 \$500 to \$800 between the US and Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic.
- Passport and visa fees.
- COVID tests.
- Divergent airport transfers and extra hotel nights.
- Tips for cab drivers and porters for transfers.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting about \$75 to \$100 per participant per day for six days with our ship crew (about \$450 to \$600 total per participant).
- Wetsuit and snorkeling gear (mask, snorkel, and snorkel fins) with limited rental availability.
- Emergency evacuation insurance and trip cancellation insurance. For more information see www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance.
- Items of a personal nature such as 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

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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 for 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 typically the least windy time of the whale season with infrequent rain.

Fitness Level and Snorkeling Experience

At a minimum, you must be able to move around the ship and embark/disembark from the tenders comfortably and safely. However, 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 the tender ladder. Although strong swimming ability and the ability to free dive (i.e., diving underwater without scuba tanks) are not required, they will enrich your experience, especially if you can dive to hear the whales sing.

Getting in the water is not required; we've shared this trip with travelers who had wonderful experiences whale watching from the tenders. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging or if you don't have experience snorkeling but would like to join this trip.

Seasickness

Don't let a fear of seasickness scare you away! The crossing to and from the Silver Bank is usually calm, but we can encounter rough sea conditions. At the mooring area, the waters are relatively calm. Because we are about 80mi offshore from the Dominican Republic on an ocean frontier, sea conditions are subject to Mother Nature's many moods. Travelers rarely get seasick while in the tenders. 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 and contact us if you have any concerns.

Flights

Airfare is not included in trip costs. Detailed logistical information is included in the Trip Materials we will send you.

Flights you (or a travel agent) book: Arrive in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (POP) by 2:00pm on March 16. Depart from Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (POP) after 12:00am on March 23.

Terms and Conditions

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

Conservation

Our company ethos has always regarded conservation as inseparable from responsible tourism. We struggle with the dilemma that traveling worldwide expends climate-changing carbon. However, we wholeheartedly believe that traveling with us will cultivate your passion for conserving our beautiful world, while stimulating each destination's local economies.

We take you to amazing destinations, navigating far and wide, and when we do, we recognize that the world pays a steep price. Taking this into account, we have made each trip carbon neutral (<https://cheesemans.com/carbon-neutral>).

And, by signing up with us, you pledge to offset your carbon emissions to and from your trip, either through your favorite offsetting organization or by using our handy carbon calculator (<https://cheesemans.com/carbon-calculator>).

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 square miles (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. The average water depth is approximately 80 to 90ft. Wind can impede whale watching, so weather will dictate your quality of activity with the whales.

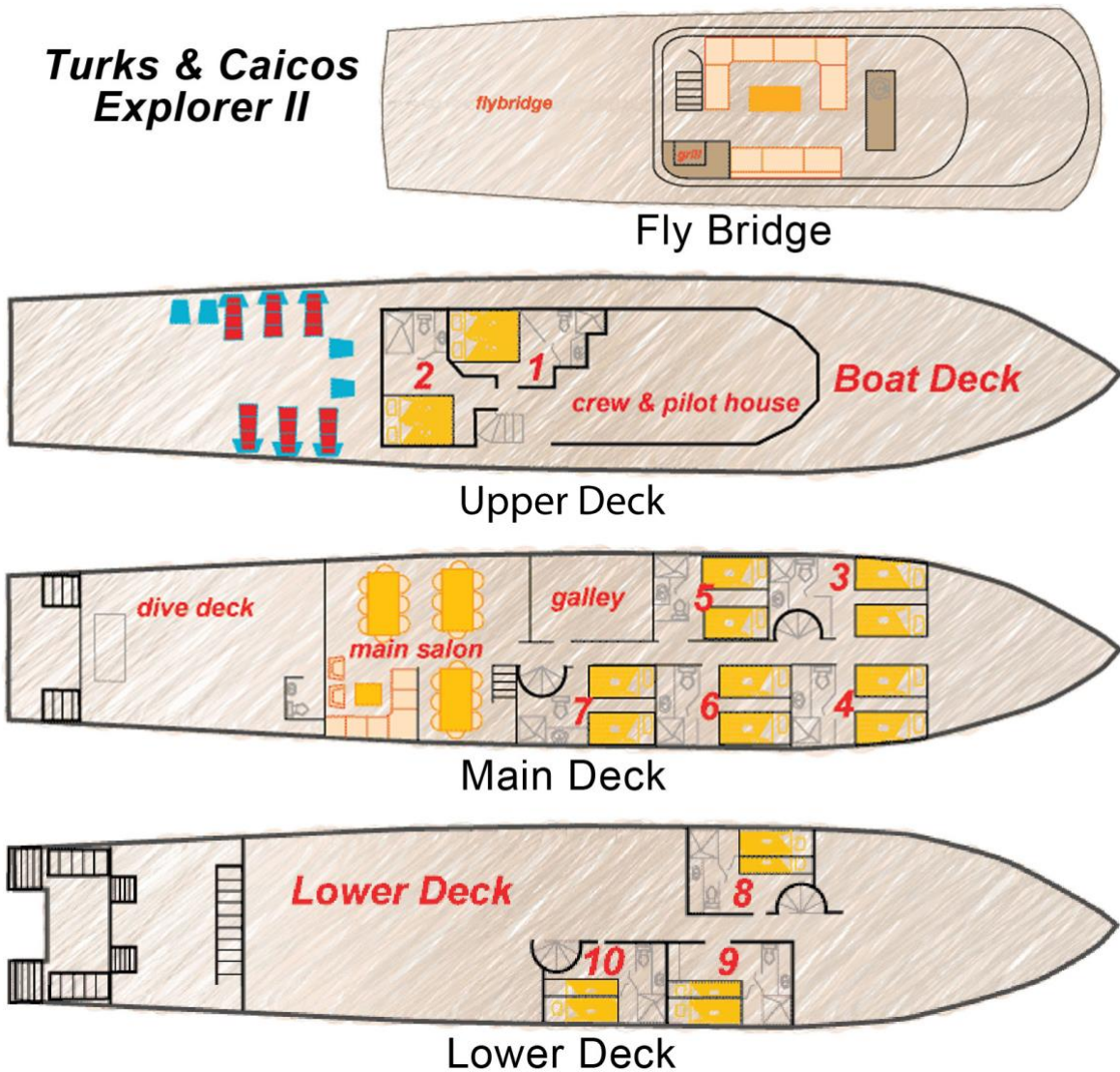
What is a soft in-water encounter?

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 you 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 tenders for full days of whale observations both above and below water (with opportunities to participate in the research collaboration). 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



Deck plan and cabin sizes are not to scale.