

# Voluntary Dolphin Swim Guidelines

## Bimini | Bahamas

*Note: This list is not written in priority order. All points are important. This list was written by veteran dolphin swim operators near Bimini with the long-term well-being of the dolphins in mind. The aim is to foster a feeling of all working together with the same understandings and with the protection of the dolphins into the future being paramount.*



1. Operate vessel at 8 knots or less when in close proximity to dolphin groups.
2. Observe dolphin groups from the surface to determine dolphin behavior. Do not allow swimmers to enter the water if the group appears to be resting. Resting is typically slow group movement at or near the surface with limited interactions between dolphins, no direction or speed changes, no ariel behaviors, no bow riding and slow/splashless breaths. If the dolphins are bottom feeding the human swimmers should only watch from the surface. If the dolphins are feeding at the surface or mid-water (i.e. feeding in a way other than bottom feeding), swimmers should not enter the water. If the dolphins are actively mating, human swimmers should observe without directly interacting with the dolphins.
3. The number of vessels interacting with a single dolphin group is limited to one for the safety of both the dolphins and human swimmers, unless radio communication has been established. If radio contact is not established, vessel will stay at least 1/2 mile away from another vessel interacting with dolphins.
4. Do not circle if the dolphin group appears to be feeding or resting and never make repetitive tight circles.
5. Every operator should give an educational talk to all human swimmers, which includes this code of conduct, before their first dolphin swim. Most important:
  - Not touching the dolphins at any time. If at any point a dolphin initiates contact with a human swimmer, this is not an invitation to touch the dolphin back. Swimmers are encouraged to swim with their hands at their sides, across their chests or behind their backs.

- Limit horizontal swimming so as not to actively pursue the dolphins. Vertical swimming is acceptable, provided swimmers are conscientious of other swimmers and dolphins as they return to the surface.
6. In order to monitor the interactions with the dolphins and to protect them, there should be one trained crew member in the water per 12 swimmers, and a maximum of 25 persons in the water at one time.
  7. All human swimmers should enter the water calmly and quietly in close proximity to the dolphins. No large splashes.
  8. No foreign objects aside from floatation devices and camera equipment will be brought into the water with the dolphins.
  9. If the dolphins turn away or change direction a third time during an attempt to approach, then the vessel moves on.
  10. No flash photography after sunset.
  11. No sounds will be played under water.
  12. Strictly no feeding policy!
  13. All waste will be returned to shore with the vessel.
  14. An overall effort will be made to discourage private boaters and non-established operators from seeking interactions with the dolphins. No one agreeing to these guidelines shall give such boaters assistance or advice, nor serve as a guide, in finding dolphins.
  15. All interested tourists are encouraged to sign-up with an experienced local operator who is authorized to take walk-in guests and in agreement with this code of conduct.
  16. Any stranded or entangled dolphins (or other marine mammals, sea turtles) will be reported to the Bahamas Marine Mammal Stranding Network: **347-3033 or 242-544-5409.**
  17. These guidelines will be reviewed annually.

*Kelly Sweeting of the Dolphin Communication Project is available should you have questions regarding why any of these points are important for dolphins given their biology and behavior.*