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Wild Dolphin Stewardship Program Welcomes New Florida Keys Tour Operator
Visitors Encouraged to be "SMART" When Viewing Wild Dolphins

NOAA and partners welcome a new Florida Keys tour operator into the Dolphin SMART wild dolphin conservation program. [Islescapes Cruises](#) earned Dolphin SMART recognition after successfully demonstrating responsible viewing and advertising of dolphins in the wild and educating patrons on the importance of dolphin conservation.

Responsible viewing of dolphins to ensure their behaviors are not disrupted is a cornerstone of the Dolphin SMART program. Inappropriate viewing of wild dolphins may disrupt important behaviors, such as feeding, nursing and resting, resulting in negative impacts to the health of dolphins and their young. Such disturbance may also be a violation of the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act.

"Observing dolphins in the wild is a memorable experience, but if your viewing disturbs the animals, you could be doing more harm than good," said Jessica Powell, NOAA Fisheries Dolphin SMART regional coordinator. "Staying at least 50 yards away from wild dolphins reduces the risk of such disturbance and increases your chances of observing natural behaviors."

Islescapes is one of 10 Dolphin SMART recognized operators in Florida and Alabama, and the third operator in the [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#). NOAA encourages visitors to the Florida Keys, southwest Florida and Alabama to book with a Dolphin SMART operator. Vessels of participating businesses carry a Dolphin SMART flag and decal with the current calendar year. A list of current Dolphin SMART businesses is available online at www.dolphinSMART.org.

"Viewing wild dolphins is an opportunity for visitors to the Florida Keys to gain a better appreciation for the marine environment," said Sean Morton, superintendent of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. "We encourage those fortunate enough to observe wild dolphins to do so in a responsible manner."

Guests booking Dolphin SMART businesses can be assured they will enjoy an enhanced tour experience, while knowing they are aiding wild dolphin conservation efforts. Dolphin SMART businesses are trained by experts to recognize behaviors and provide educational information about the animals. They also only display advertisements showing natural wild dolphin behaviors without human influences, another cornerstone of the program.

"Wild dolphins benefit from the Dolphin SMART program because both the public and the tour operators become more aware of the sensitivities associated with viewing dolphins," said Alex Aller, owner of Islescapes Cruises.

The Dolphin SMART program was launched in 2007 by [NOAA's Fisheries Service](#) and [Office of National Marine Sanctuaries](#), [Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society](#), and [Dolphin Ecology Project](#). The "SMART" acronym is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins,

- **M**ove away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
- **A**lways put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
- **R**efrain from feeding, touching, or swimming with wild dolphins,
- **T**each others to be Dolphin SMART.

Local businesses and organizations in Florida and Alabama are also showing their solidarity for wild dolphin conservation by becoming *Proud Supporters* of Dolphin SMART. Dolphin SMART *Proud Supporters* help raise public awareness about the program and educate the public on why it is important to responsibly view wild dolphins. A [list](#) of Dolphin SMART *Proud Supporters* is also available on the program Web site.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects 2,900 square nautical miles of important marine habitat, including maritime heritage resources, as well as coral reef, hard bottom, seagrass meadows, mangrove communities and sand flats. NOAA and the state of Florida manage the sanctuary. NOAA Fisheries has additional responsibilities for protecting wild dolphins under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

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On the Web:

NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Southeast: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/southeast/>