

A Guide to

# Responsible Whale Watching

WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation



WHALE AND  
DOLPHIN  
CONSERVATION

WDC

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WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

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WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, is the leading global charity dedicated to the conservation and protection of whales and dolphins. We defend these remarkable creatures against the many threats they face through campaigns, lobbying, advising governments, conservation projects, field research and rescue.

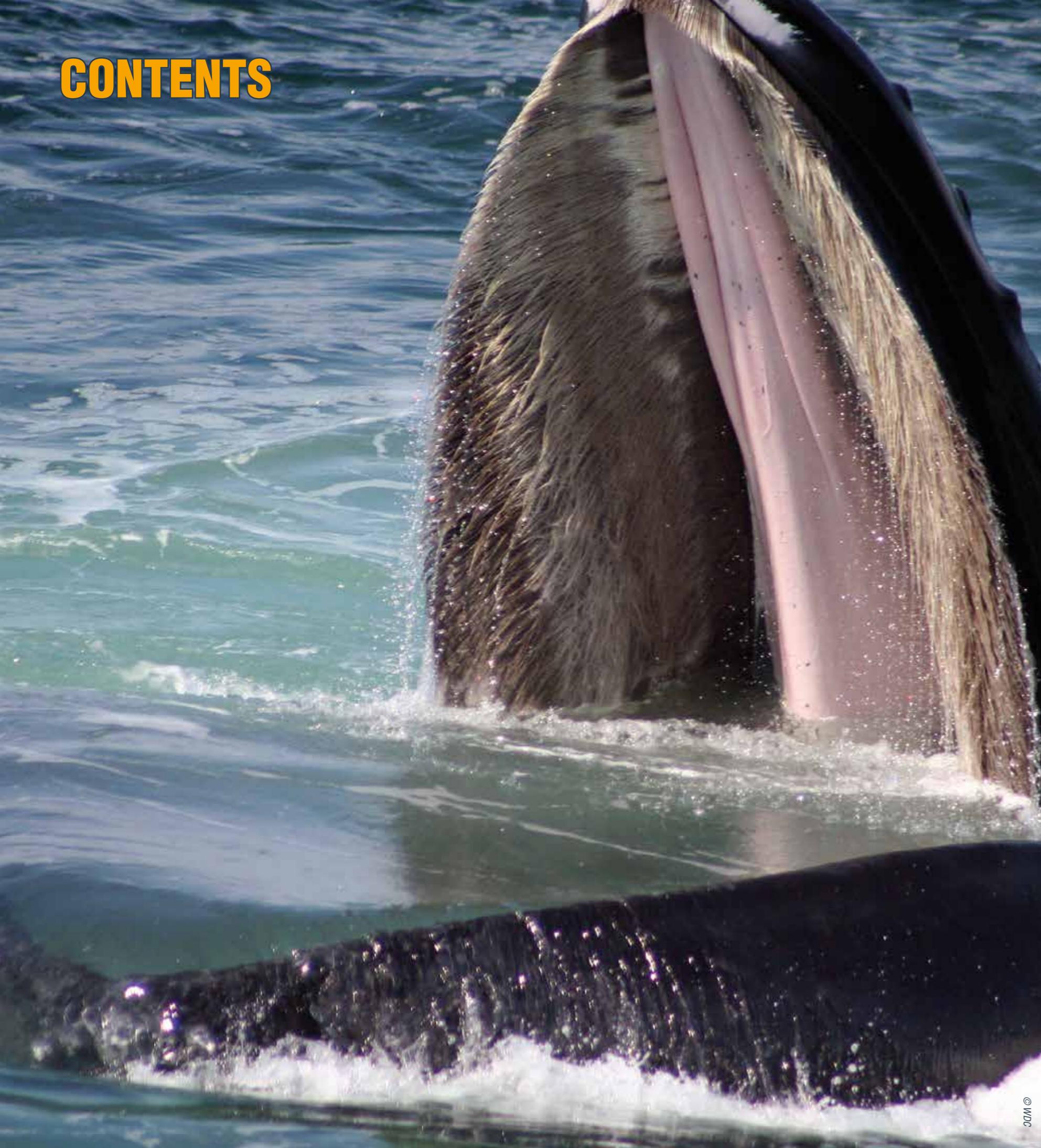
Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free.

WDC is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No. 1014705), and Scotland (SC040231).  
In the United States we are a registered 501c3 nonprofit.

Cover image: © Melanie Megnet

All information is considered correct at time of publication.

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# FOREWORD



## FOREWORD

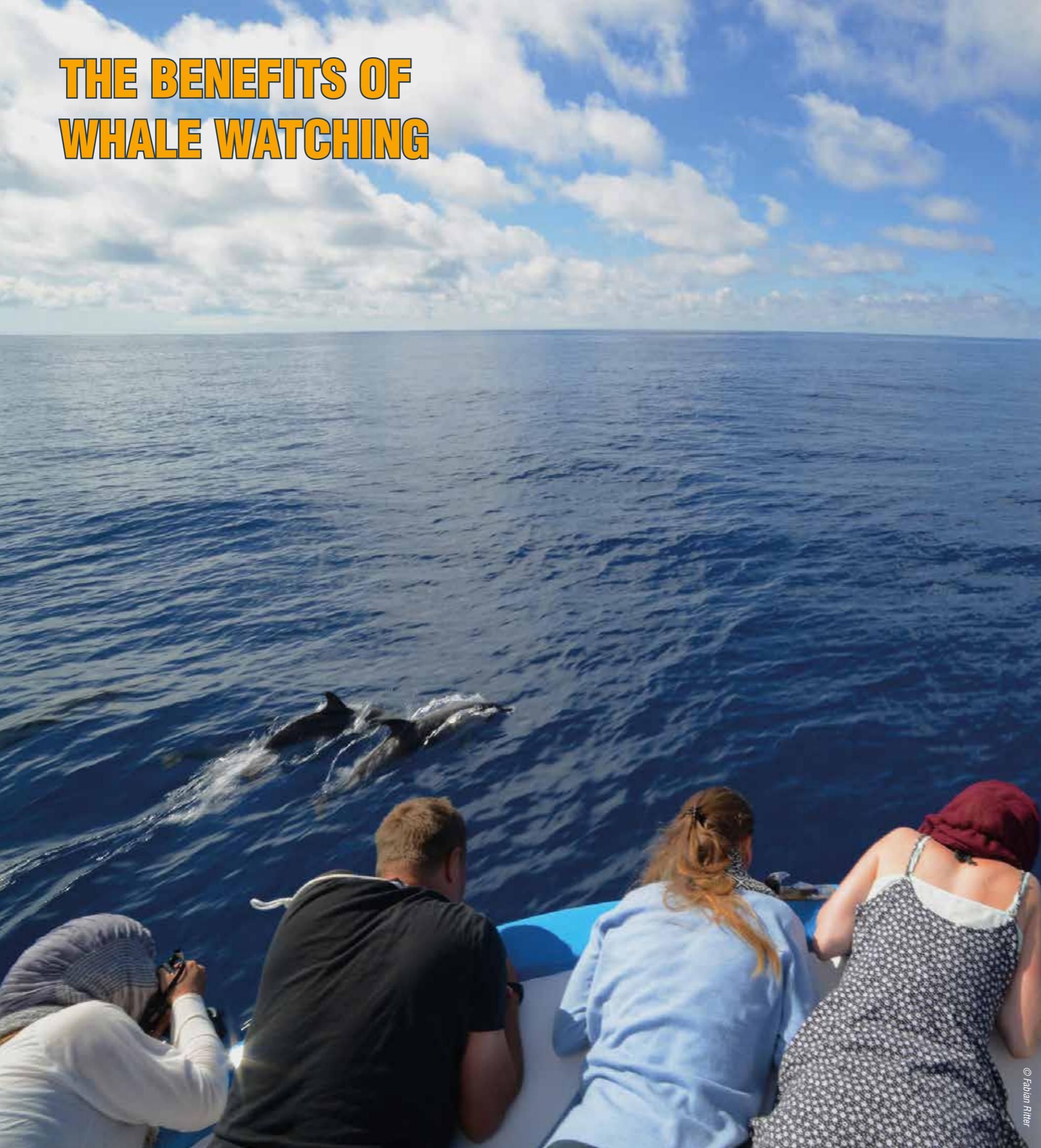
In recent years, whale watching has taken off in a big way all over the world. Latest figures show that over 13 million people a year are taking a whale watch trip, in an industry spanning 120 countries and overseas territories worldwide, generating \$2.1 billion in total revenues – so whale watching is very big business! There is no such thing as a typical trip, they vary enormously depending on location, the whale or dolphin species in the vicinity and the type of vessel used: these range from huge cruise ships to small yachts and even kayaks. It is also possible to watch whales and dolphins without leaving dry land (perfect for those who want to avoid seasickness!) and WDC recommends this whenever possible as it reduces the likelihood of whales and dolphins being disturbed. One thing is certain though – seeing whales and dolphins in the wild, where they belong, can be an exhilarating and even life-changing experience.



*Over the past 25 years or so, I have been fortunate to see whales and dolphins - and let's not forget porpoises! - in many locations around the world. Highlights include meeting blue whales, sperm whales and spinner dolphins off Sri Lanka; orcas off Vancouver Island, Canada; humpbacks and fin whales off Cape Cod, USA; bottlenose dolphins off Scotland's Moray Firth; minke whales off Iceland and dusky dolphins off New Zealand. Some encounters over the years have arguably been more memorable, but each one has invariably left me with a huge grin on my face. Because this is the gift that whales give: meeting them is enchanting, fascinating and often life-changing. If you've never tried whale watching before, I really recommend it as the ultimate feelgood wildlife experience - just do your research in advance, pick a responsible operator (or find a good land-based site) and give it a go!*

**Vanessa Williams-Grey, Responsible Whale Watching Lead WDC**

# THE BENEFITS OF WHALE WATCHING



## THE BENEFITS OF WHALE WATCHING

Whale watching has huge potential to deliver benefits to both people and whales, but it is essential that the experience on offer is of a sufficiently high standard to provide not only an economic benefit to operators and local communities, but equally important, benefit whale watchers; the whales, dolphins and porpoises (collectively known as cetaceans) and the marine environment as a whole.

### Benefits to whale watch passengers

#### Responsible whale watching

- offers the opportunity to see whales and dolphins in their natural habitat rather than in a captive setting, and therefore to witness natural behaviour.
- offers the opportunity to learn about cetaceans and their natural environment, and also the threats they face.
- often inspires advocacy for whales and dolphins, and their environment.
- offers people visiting and living in whaling regions the opportunity to meet and foster an appreciation for live whales and thus promote attitude change.

### Benefits to research and conservation of whales and dolphins and their habitat

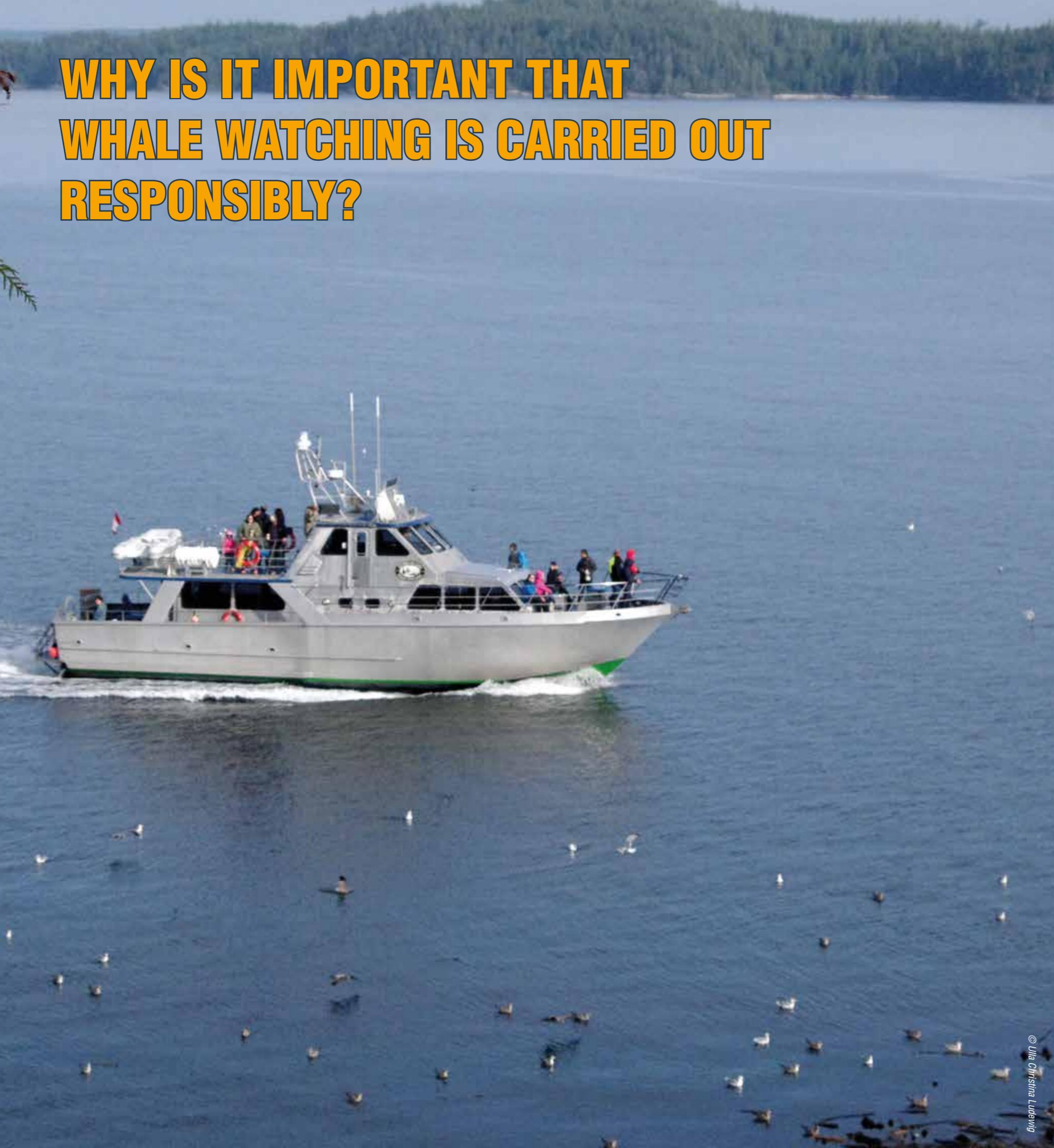
#### Responsibly-managed whale watching vessels

- offer valuable platforms for benign research and data collection on the behaviour and ecology of whales and dolphins.
- provide 'eyes on the water' and thus reduce the risk that watched whales and dolphins will be disturbed or even struck. They can also report important whale sightings or behaviours; identify entangled whales or whales in distress, and monitor them until expert assistance arrives.

#### Economic benefits

- Whale watching offers an important source of income for coastal communities and regions, providing jobs and contributing to the development of the local tourism infrastructure.
- Whales are long-lived creatures and, if watched responsibly, may be viewed in the wild over many decades. From an economic viewpoint (in addition to obvious conservation and ethical perspectives), they are therefore 'worth' considerably more alive than dead. In many whaling regions, e.g. Iceland, the whale watch industry is many times more profitable than whaling.

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WHALE WATCHING IS CARRIED OUT RESPONSIBLY?



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WHALE WATCHING IS CARRIED OUT RESPONSIBLY?

The phenomenal global success of this industry has not come without a price. In recent years, concerns have been raised about the industry's possible impact upon individual or groups of whales and dolphins, and also at a population level. In many instances, whale watching involves targeting specific whale and dolphin communities for prolonged, often close-up, encounters. As the demand for more frequent encounters increases, it can be argued that it is the responsibility of all stakeholders (conservation authorities, the scientific community and the industry itself) to assess the effects of these activities upon these populations. Short-term behavioural responses by whales and/or dolphins to vessels in close proximity have been well-documented. These include:

- Active avoidance or response to vessels: for example, rapidly changing speed or direction, or diving more frequently
- Changes in surface activity in the presence of boats
- Reduction in foraging behaviour
- Reduction in resting and socialising behaviour
- Noise from vessels affecting vocalisation patterns

# WDC'S WORK TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE WHALE WATCHING

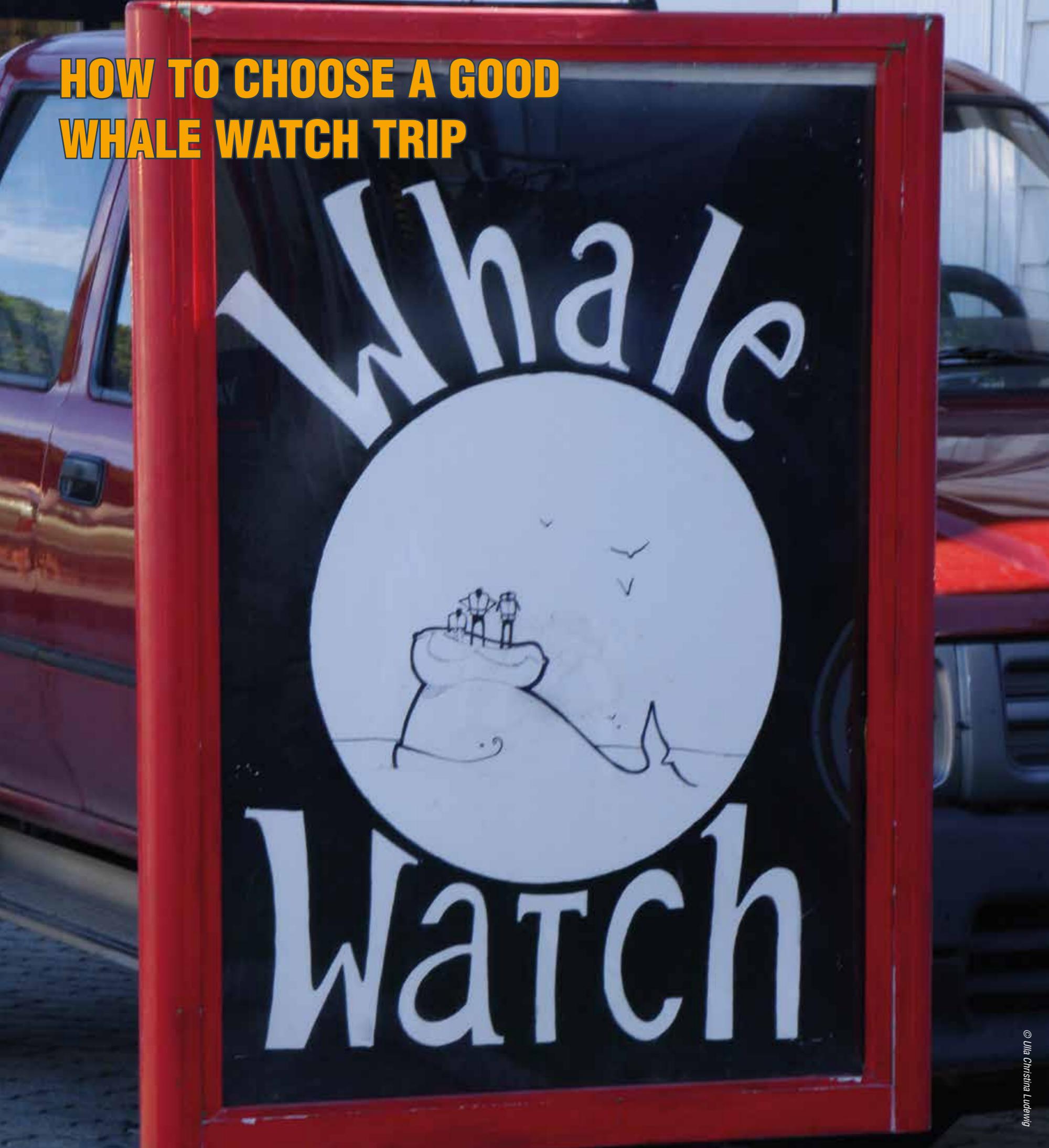


## WDC'S WORK TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE WHALE WATCHING

In recent years, WDC has put policy into practice by promoting sustainable, well-managed whale watching in a variety of ways, including:

- Running training workshops for operators and onboard naturalists: for example, in the Azores, Central and Latin America, Iceland, Japan, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Scotland, Sri Lanka, Tenerife, Thailand and the US.
- Creating educational materials and presentations for passengers and whale watch naturalists.
- Encouraging and assisting official agencies and other stakeholders to employ “best practice” when drawing up or revising whale watch regulations or guidelines, and calling for adequate monitoring and enforcement of regulations and compliance with guidelines.
- Promoting opportunities for well-managed land-based viewing where possible.
- Promoting the “one third space and time” concept which offers whales and dolphins a daily minimum respite period to prevent continuous targeting by vessels.
- Carrying out our own research, including the long-term conservation benefits of whale watching.
- WDC has worked in Sri Lanka since 2012 to promote responsible viewing of blue whales and other whale species in Sri Lanka under our Project BLUEprint programme. Working collaboratively with in country ecotourism partners, our work to date has focused on developing community-based whale watching in Mirissa and Kalpitiya with the aim being to eventually extend this model to other whale watch regions.
- In the United States, WDC is a founding partner on four voluntary education and recognition programmes:
  - i.) **Dolphin SMART** aims to promote responsible viewing and stewardship of wild dolphins. Launched in 2007, the programme is a collaborative effort between WDC, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Dolphin Ecology Project, and local dolphin-watch tour operators. It currently has participating operators in Florida, Alabama, and Hawaii. [www.dolphinsmart.org](http://www.dolphinsmart.org)
  - ii.) **WHALE SENSE** is offered to commercial whale watching companies in the US Atlantic and Alaska through a partnership between WDC, NOAA Fisheries Service, and the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. [www.whalesense.org](http://www.whalesense.org)
  - iii.) A further programme, **See A Spout, Watch Out!** is offered to recreational vessel operators in the Northeast US through a partnership between WDC, NOAA Fisheries Service, and the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. [www.seeaspout.org](http://www.seeaspout.org)
  - iv.) **Sharing the Seas: Safe Boating For Sailors and Whales** aims to protect sailors and whales from dangerous collisions and empower sailors with ways to get involved in marine conservation efforts. Sailors are provided with information on safe boating practices, whale species identification and migration, and how to report sightings of whales in distress. The programme is a partnership between WDC, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, and New Bedford Whaling Museum, with input from US Sailing and Sailors for the Sea. [www.seeaspout.org/sail/](http://www.seeaspout.org/sail/)

# HOW TO CHOOSE A GOOD WHALE WATCH TRIP



## HOW TO CHOOSE A GOOD WHALE WATCH TRIP

WDC receives literally hundreds of requests each year from supporters who want to go whale and dolphin watching. Whether you are planning the trip of a lifetime to see whales in Antarctica or Australia, or just want to take a half-day excursion as one of the highlights of your holiday in Boston or Tenerife, one thing is almost certain: you will be faced with a bewildering choice of whale watch tours!

You may find that up to a dozen or more companies offer tours from the same harbour and it can be difficult to know which one to choose. It is tempting to believe that all operators offer much the same experience, but in fact, this is not always the case. It is important to recognise that a good whale watch trip is one which is not only enjoyable, educational and safe for the passengers, but also treats the whales and dolphins being watched with care and respect – and this means the minimum of intrusion.

Using only those operators who provide a truly balanced experience sends out a powerful message to the poorer operators to improve the quality of their venture.

Here are some guidelines for selecting a good tour:

### **A good whale watch operator will ...**

#### **... put the whales and dolphins first**

This means careful and responsible boat handling. It is sometimes easy to forget that we are uninvited guests in the whales' world and we are privileged to see them. We have a responsibility to cause as little disturbance as possible. It is always tempting to try to get as close as possible to the whales, especially if you are trying to take photographs, but remember that they are truly wild and constant disturbance can seriously affect their ability to feed, rest and rear their young. In fact, careful and considerate behaviour around the whales usually results in much longer encounters with them, and the added bonus of observing more interesting and natural behaviour.

#### **... follow regulations governing whale watching in their region**

In some parts of the world, there are specific regulations governing whale watching (eg specifying minimum approach distances) with legal enforcement. However, in many other areas, there may be a code of conduct, but no means of enforcing this, relying on adequate training of participating operators. Worse still, there are areas where whale watching is completely unregulated with nothing to prevent irresponsible operators from continually harassing the whales and dolphins in an attempt to get their passengers close to the whales as quickly as possible.

It is a good idea to find out whether any regulations or voluntary codes apply in the area before you get on the boat. Ask the operator some questions to show that you are aware of regulations and don't be afraid to speak up if you feel that a boat captain is not behaving responsibly.

#### **... have adequate safety provisions**

A safe whale watch boat should have an knowledgeable skipper and crew, operating legally and with appropriate training and licensing for their region. The

trip should include an appropriate safety briefing for all passengers and carry all necessary safety equipment (life jackets etc) in case of an accident.

#### **... offer high standards of customer care**

This means honest advertising of what passengers can expect from the trip. This may include offering a "sightings success rate" but this should be realistic as, with few exceptions, it is virtually impossible to guarantee sightings on every trip. Every aspect of the trip should be professional, including punctual departures; the vessel should be clean, and the crew friendly and polite. If a trip has to be cancelled due to adverse sea and weather conditions, find out whether there is a policy of refunding fares or offering free places on a future trip.

#### **... have an onboard naturalist-guide**

This is really important and can really enhance the trip and make for a truly memorable experience! Choose a vessel which offers some form of educational commentary – preferably both before and during the trip. The larger boats may employ a trained naturalist and this is always preferable, but on the smaller boats, the skipper may also act as the guide.

A good guide will give you a factual and informative commentary on the various species of whale and dolphin you are hoping to see, as well as the other marine wildlife in the area. They will also be knowledgeable about any threats facing local marine wildlife or their habitat. It can be difficult to positively identify a whale or dolphin which is some distance away and here, the trained eyes of the guide will help you to identify that "small black fin to starboard". The guide will also be able to interpret the behaviour of the whales and dolphins being observed and this can really add to your understanding and enjoyment of the experience. A really well-rounded commentary may also include various education materials, and the guide may even pass around some (legally-sourced) artefacts such as samples of baleen, a jawbone, or teeth, for passengers to examine.

#### **... carry out research**

There are several advantages in whale watching companies voluntarily providing data to researchers.

On some boats, the naturalist-guide may also use the vessel as a platform for their research activities, such as logging sightings, and conducting photo-identification studies. Sometimes passengers may be able to assist with simple activities. This adds a new dimension to the experience and is also an excellent way of learning and feeling more involved. A good operator will recognise the need to find out as much as possible about the whales, dolphins and other wildlife in the area. Ongoing research can benefit their business by providing a continually expanding source of knowledge on the local whales and their daily and seasonal movements.

So, in summary, when researching a good trip, look out for:

- An operator who sticks to local whale watching regulations and guidelines and who meets, or exceeds, required safety and licensing standards
- A tour which includes an experienced naturalist or guide
- Links with a research group, educational facility or conservation association
- As an added bonus, in some regions companies provide an informative website or information leaflets, or offer special features or equipment such as hydrophones to enhance the experience.

Before you book a trip or buy tickets for a certain boat, do some online research, ask for an information leaflet, read display boards or ask questions at the booking office. Make sure that you are happy with what is on offer before you actually board any vessel.

 If you find an excellent tour operator, please recommend it to others, as well as to us. We welcome your further comments and suggestions. Please send us your reports on whale watching trips around the world, positive and negative to [whalewatch@whales.org](mailto:whalewatch@whales.org)



# THE IMPORTANCE OF WHALE WATCH REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

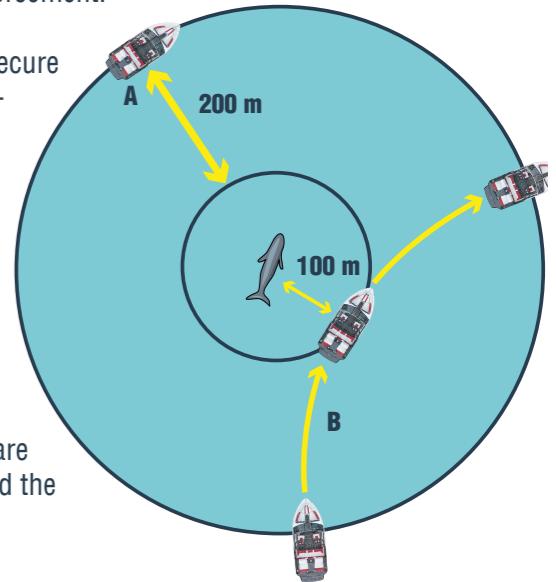


## THE IMPORTANCE OF WHALE WATCH REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

The rapid growth of whale watching in recent years has led to a host of practical problems in many regions, including over-crowding; vessels approaching too closely or remaining too long; or more serious problems such as chasing or even colliding with watched cetaceans. In response, many countries have produced formal regulations or national guidelines, outlining minimum requirements for individuals or vessels operating in the vicinity of cetaceans.

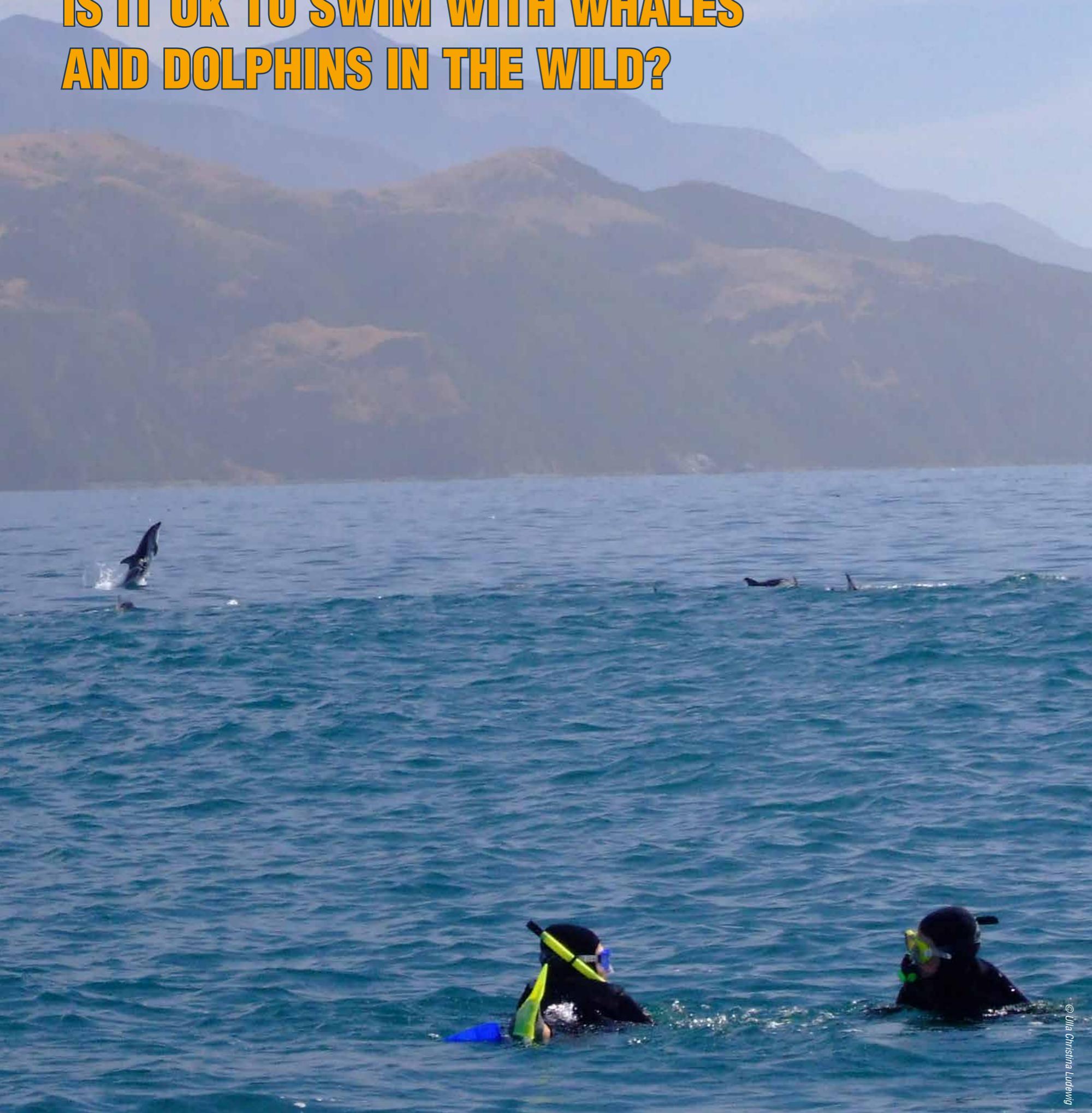
Ideally, regulations should draw upon best practice globally and consider relevant research findings. They should be both sensible and precautionary, recognizing the need to combine an enjoyable viewing experience with safety and welfare considerations for both viewers and cetaceans. Formal regulations should include provisions for monitoring and enforcement.

The aim, of course, should be to secure well-crafted regulations (accompanied by adequate monitoring and enforcement) for each region, however, where these are absent, voluntary guidelines or codes of conduct can be very helpful. Often these are developed at local or regional level. WDC has assisted in the development of regulations and guidelines around the world; however, for regions where these are not yet available, we have produced the following simple code of conduct.



- REMEMBER to allow the whales and dolphins to decide what happens
- KEEP your distance! Especially if other vessels are in the vicinity.
- MAINTAIN a steady direction and slow 'no wake' speed
- NEVER approach whales and dolphins head-on to or move between, scatter or separate individuals. If unsure of their movements, simply stop and put the engine into neutral
- IF whales or dolphins approach your boat or bow-ride, maintain a slow speed and course until clear. Whales and dolphins should never be chased or harassed in an attempt to make them bow-ride
- SPECIAL care must be taken with mothers and young, and around whales that are feeding or resting, as they are particularly sensitive to disturbance
- NEVER try to swim with or touch whales and dolphins, for your safety and theirs

# IS IT OK TO SWIM WITH WHALES AND DOLPHINS IN THE WILD?



## IS IT OK TO SWIM WITH WHALES AND DOLPHINS IN THE WILD?

Whilst many people love the idea of swimming with dolphins or whales in the wild, it is very difficult to ensure that it is not an intrusive or stressful experience for the marine mammals involved. The majority of countries with whale watch regulations or guidelines either prohibit or strongly advise against the practice, due to well-documented concerns about the safety and welfare of both swimmers and whales. WDC strongly recommends against this activity for many reasons, including the following:

### Disturbance to whales and dolphins from swim-tour vessels:

Swim tour vessels need to drop people in the water close to whales or dolphins, often infringing regulations regarding approach distances and increasing the likelihood of harassment. Scientists have documented many instances of disturbance to the essential daily life processes of whales and dolphins in regions where people are allowed in the water with them, including

- Spending more time milling or travelling and less time resting,
- Spending less time socializing, resting or being active at the surface,
- Rapidly changing speed or direction or diving more frequently to avoid swim tour boats,
- Demonstrating avoidance behaviour and an increase in surface activity, especially relating to close or noisy approach by vessels,
- Leaving their usual homes in favour of quieter areas.

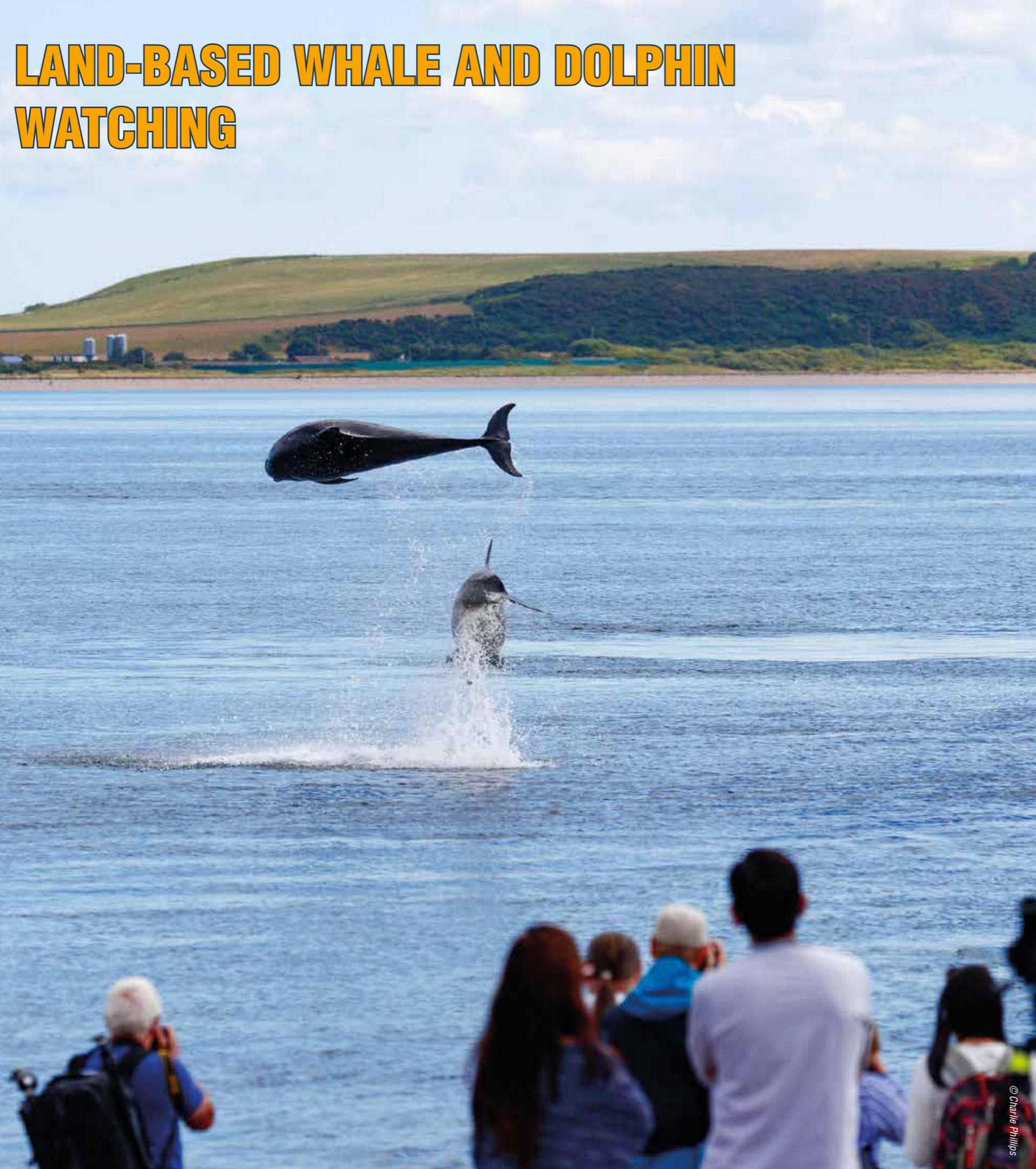
These interruptions to life processes cause whales and dolphins to waste precious energy, and may be particularly harmful to breeding age females and mothers with calves. Over time, they may have long-term effects upon the health and reproductive success of the population. Close approaches also increase the likelihood of vessel strike, particularly an issue for swim tour boats which drop swimmers very close to targeted cetaceans.

### Dangers to swimmers in the open ocean:

Whales and dolphins are large (often extremely large) and typically, are robust and powerful. They may react unpredictably – this is especially true of females with young calves – and can injure people in the water, either accidentally, or if they feel threatened in any way. Swimming into the path of a whale or dolphin is especially risky.

© Ulla Christina Ludwig

# LAND-BASED WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING



## LAND-BASED WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING

Watching whales and dolphins from land is becoming more and more popular. It takes more patience but it is the ideal way to watch the natural behaviour of these fascinating marine mammals without disturbing or influencing them. Look for areas with deep water close to shore. The best spots are at least a few metres above the sea (10 – 20 m or more is ideal).

### Some basic tips for spotting whales and dolphins from land:

- Bring along good binoculars or a spotting scope, sunscreen and a hat.
- Search for something unusual: a blow (exhaled air from the blowhole of a whale or dolphin, visible above the surface), a strange splash, something dark flashing above the surface, seabirds mobbing a certain area and so on. Spend a little extra time examining these areas to find out whether whales or dolphins might be present.
- Concentrate on slowly scanning one area of the sea for about five minutes before moving on. Remember dolphins and many whales stay underwater for at least this length of time (some whale species remain underwater for much longer of course!) so you need enough time to ensure that you have properly scanned a certain area of water.
- Give your eyes a break by stepping back from the telescope or putting down your binoculars and watch with the naked eye from time to time. This also helps to ensure that you're not missing something obvious that's closer or off to one side.
- Bring a friend or two, if possible, to alternate your searching time and/or to cover a wider area.
- Carry refreshments with you so that you don't need to leave your viewing spot. Please remember to take any litter with you and dispose of it properly.
- If you are watching for more than an hour or two, take breaks. It is difficult to keep your attention sharp for longer than 15-30 minutes. However, there is always something of interest happening on the sea – and it's always different. So even if you don't spot whales or dolphins, there should be lots of interesting things to discover.

# BEST PLACES TO SEE WHALES AND DOLPHINS WORLDWIDE



# ARGENTINA: PENÍNSULA VALDÉS



© Southern right whale / Orca / Southern right whale



## ARGENTINA: PENÍNSULA VALDÉS

Península Valdés is one of the most beautiful and remote places in the world and rightly famous for the great biodiversity in its waters. Tourists have the opportunity to watch southern right whales in the nursery ground of Península Valdés, from land-based viewpoints at El Doradillo and also from Puerto Pirámides and Puerto Madryn. There is also the possibility of seeing other species such as orcas, dusky dolphins and bottlenose dolphins. Punta Norte is a world famous site for watching orcas beach themselves. Although the orcas mainly hunt the young sea lions and elephant seals from February to early May, they can be seen throughout the year practicing their routines along the shore and many people visit Punta Norte especially to see them.

Country or region	Argentina, Chubut																						
Location:	Península Valdés																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Southern right whale																						
Species occasionally seen:	Dusky dolphin, orca, bottlenose dolphin																						
Types of whale watching on offer:		2 hour trips																					
		El Doradillo beach, Puerto Pirámides, Puerto Madryn and various lookouts around Península Valdés.																					
Any concerns?	Gravel road at Península Valdés. Drive slowly.																						
Added value:	Península Valdés (UNESCO World Heritage); Istmo Ameghino local museum, Ecocentro Puerto Madryn																						
Other good sites:	Miramar, Balneario El Cóndor, Las Grutas, Playa Unión, Camarones, Puerto Deseado, Bahía San Julián, Canal de Beagle																						

# AUSTRALIA'S EAST COAST



© Humpback whales off Fraser Island | Bottlenose dolphins near Port Stephens | Breaching humpback whale



## AUSTRALIA'S EAST COAST

Australia's East Coast offers many locations for whale watching, from Port Douglas and Cairns in Northern Queensland to the small town of Eden on the southern tip of New South Wales. On North Stradbroke Island and in Byron Bay, for example, it is possible to observe humpback whales from shore as they make their migration along the coast.

Country or region	Australia, Queensland																						
Location:	Hervey Bay																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Humpback whale, bottlenose dolphin (year-round)																						
Species occasionally seen:	Minke whale, Bryde's whale, Rissö's dolphin, Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, pilot whale																						
Types of whale watching on offer:		Half-day trips																					
Any concerns?	Some operators offer swimming with humpback whales in this region. Please note that WDC does not encourage people to swim with any species of cetacean. For more information please see page 20 of this brochure.																						
Added value:	Fraser Coast Discovery Sphere																						
Other good sites:	Cairns, Port Douglas, Whitsunday Islands, Moreton Island, North Stradbroke Island (great land-based viewing opportunities)																						

Country or region	Australia, New South Wales																						
Location:	Byron Bay																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Humpback whale, bottlenose dolphin (year round)																						
Species occasionally seen:	Orca, southern right whale, blue whale, minke whale, pilot whale, sperm whale, beaked whales																						
Types of whale watching on offer:		Half-day trips																					
		Byron Bay is one of the best locations in Australia to see humpback whales from land at Cape Byron, the most easterly point of the continent.																					
Any concerns?	Wild dolphins are being fed in several locations in Australia. WDC does not recommend supporting this activity as it alters the dolphins' natural behaviour and ability to hunt their own prey.																						
Added value:	The Maritime Museum (at Cape Byron Lighthouse)																						
Other good sites:	Coffs Harbor, Jervis Bay, Port Stephens, Twofold Bay																						

# AZORES



## AZORES

Whale watching in the Azores, both by boat and from land, has flourished since 1989, two years after whaling finally came to an end. The waters around the islands offer an astonishingly wide variety of cetaceans due to the islands' central Atlantic position on the mid-Atlantic Ridge and the sheer drop-off close to shore.

Country or region	Portugal, Azores											
Location:	Lajes de Pico and Madalena on Pico Island, Ponta Delgada and Vila Franca do Campo on Sao Miguel Island, Horta on Faial Island											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Main species seen:	Sperm whale, common dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, Risso's dolphin (year-round)  Blue whale, fin whale, sei whale (in springtime)  Atlantic spotted dolphin, short-finned pilot whale, striped dolphin (mainly in summer)											
Species occasionally seen:	Minke whale, humpback whale (in springtime)  Various beaked whale species, orca, false killer whale											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Mainly half-day trips   Tourists may visit small watch towers called "vigias" in the mountains on the coast											
Any concerns?	Many operators offer swimming with dolphins. Please note that WDC does not encourage people to swim with any species of cetacean. For more information please see page 20 of this brochure.											
Added value:	Museu dos Baleeiros (Whalers' Museum) in Lajes de Pico A 3-hour walk for whale watchers includes the Vigia da Queimada, the whaling museum, the old whalers' boat house and the whaling factory											

► Bottlenose dolphin | Looking for whales and dolphins, with Pico Mountain in the background | Sperm whale diving



# BRITISH ISLES



Minke whale / Bottlenose dolphin in Scottish waters / Risso's dolphin



## BRITISH ISLES

Around 29 species of whale, dolphin and porpoise are found in the waters around the British Isles. These waters are the summer feeding ground for some species, whilst others are resident and so may be spotted year-round. Scottish waters offer some of the best and most varied opportunities for watching a wide range of species, including orcas, humpback and minke whales, plus resident bottlenose dolphins, Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoises. Resident bottlenose dolphins and other species are a great attraction off the coast of West Wales too, as well as along the coast of south-west England, and in the Shannon Estuary in County Clare, Ireland. Deeper waters around the British Isles offer sightings of larger species such as fin, sei and sperm whales and even deep-diving and elusive beaked whales.

Boat trips are available in many locations, often combining whale and dolphin watching with viewing other marine wildlife such as seabirds and seals. Perhaps best of all, the British Isles offer some of the best opportunities for land-based viewing in Europe, especially Scotland's Moray Firth; Cardigan Bay in West Wales; headlands off Cornwall, and around the western and southern coasts of Ireland.

Country or region	British Isles																							
Location:	Scotland: Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Isle of Lewis and around the Moray Firth. Wales: Cardigan Bay, and St David's Head. England: Particularly around the coasts of Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. Republic of Ireland: Mainly off the coast of County Cork, Wexford and Kerry.																							
Best time to visit:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>J</td><td>F</td><td>M</td><td>A</td><td>M</td><td>J</td><td>J</td><td>A</td><td>S</td><td>O</td><td>N</td><td>D</td></tr> </table> Year-round for resident bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises. Prime viewing season for most species and best weather conditions is May-October; however, many sightings also occur during the winter months and early spring.												J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D													
Main species seen:	Bottlenose dolphin, Risso's dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin, short-beaked common dolphin, harbour porpoise, orca, minke whale, long-finned pilot whale																							
Species occasionally seen:	Fin whale, sei whale, humpback whale																							
Types of whale watching on offer:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td><td>2-3 hour and longer trips aboard a variety of vessels</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td> <b>Scotland:</b> Chanonry Point and Fort George in the Moray Firth, Cromarty Firth, Isle of Lewis (Tiupnan Head)  <b>Wales:</b> Particularly Cardigan Bay and St David's Head.  <b>England:</b> Lizard Point and Cape Cornwall; Swanage  <b>Northern Ireland:</b> Especially Benbane Head and Ramore Head, County Antrim; and St John's Point, County Down.  <b>Republic of Ireland:</b> Many, including Slea Head and Bolus Head, County Kerry; Galley Head and Mizen Head, County Cork.         </td></tr> </table>													2-3 hour and longer trips aboard a variety of vessels		<b>Scotland:</b> Chanonry Point and Fort George in the Moray Firth, Cromarty Firth, Isle of Lewis (Tiupnan Head) <b>Wales:</b> Particularly Cardigan Bay and St David's Head. <b>England:</b> Lizard Point and Cape Cornwall; Swanage <b>Northern Ireland:</b> Especially Benbane Head and Ramore Head, County Antrim; and St John's Point, County Down. <b>Republic of Ireland:</b> Many, including Slea Head and Bolus Head, County Kerry; Galley Head and Mizen Head, County Cork.								
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Any concerns?	Lack of formal regulation. Key sites can be overcrowded with vessels.																							
Added value:	WDC's Scottish Dolphin Centre, at Spey Bay in the Moray Firth, offers a wide range of events and activities, including an interactive exhibition, talks, land-based watching and live webcam.																							

# CANADA: VANCOUVER ISLAND



Watching orcas from shore near Telegraph Cove | Whale watching vessel in Johnstone Strait | Northern Resident orca

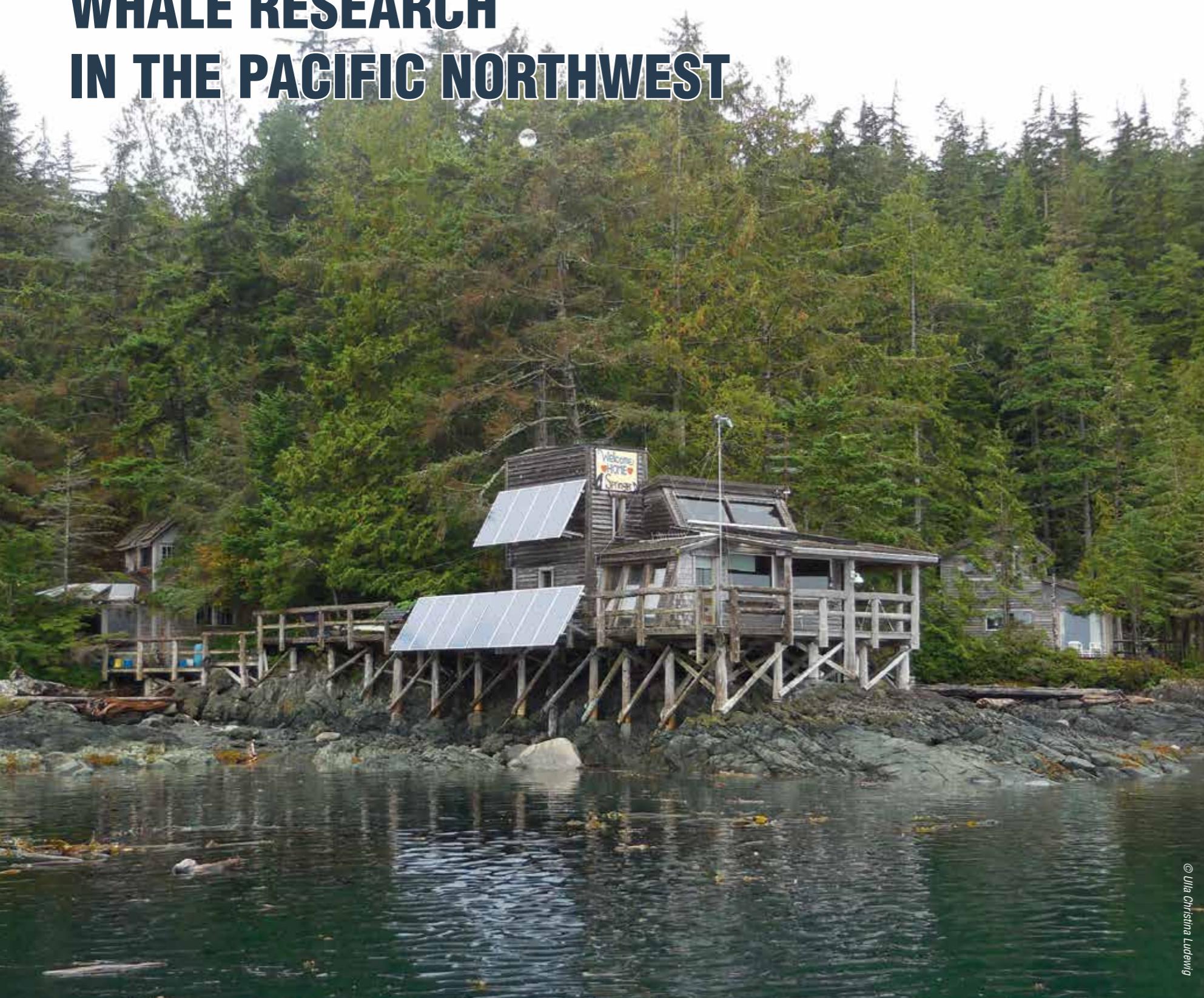


## CANADA: VANCOUVER ISLAND

Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, on Canada's west coast, is a very popular whale watching destination during summer. The north of the island is less busy and there are great opportunities to observe orcas from the Northern Resident population in their natural habitat. While the Northern Resident population consists of approximately 300 whales, the Southern Resident population, which frequents the waters of Southern Vancouver Island and Washington State, is endangered (as is their prime food source, the Chinook salmon), and currently numbers only 74 individuals (January 2019).

Country or region	Canada, British Columbia, Northern Vancouver Island											
Location:	Telegraph Cove, Alert Bay, Campbell River, Port McNeill											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Main species seen:	Orca (mainly July - October; Northern Resident population and transient ecotype) humpback whale (May – September)											
Species occasionally seen:	Harbour porpoise, Dall's porpoise, Pacific white-sided dolphin, minke whale											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Half-day trips, day trips, multiple day excursions by boat and kayak											
	 Land-based sites include direct views over Johnstone Strait from Telegraph Cove, for example											
Any concerns?	WDC recommends you thoroughly research the various companies offering boat trips from Vancouver, Victoria or other locations to see the Southern Resident orcas. This vulnerable population is exposed to a high density of boat traffic, and vessel impacts and noise pose major threats to this community. We recommend instead the many great opportunities to watch these orcas from land (see San Juan Island section of this brochure).											
Added value:	The Whale Interpretive Centre at Telegraph Cove, The Whale Trail (multiple locations)											
Other good sites:	Tofino (west side of Vancouver Island) for grey whales, March – June											

# WHALE RESEARCH IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST



► Sunrise Hanson Island | Orcas of the A5 pod | Observing orcas from OrcaLab



## WHALE RESEARCH IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

At **OrcaLab** on Hanson Island (British Columbia, Canada), Paul Spong and Helena Symonds have been researching the acoustics of the Northern Resident orca population since the 1970s. Through a network of hydrophones (underwater microphones), they record and analyze the dialects of different family groups. The **Orca Live Community** offers people around the world the opportunity to listen to the hydrophones, and live footage of the orcas is available via a camera network featured on [Explore.org](https://explore.org).

**Cetacea Lab**, situated further north on Gil Island, established a humpback whale photo ID catalogue and also records every orca sighting in the area. Both research projects are land-based and also study the impacts of human influence on the whales.

The **Center for Whale Research** has been monitoring the Southern Resident orca community for 40 years and is responsible for maintaining the official census of the population. It is located on San Juan Island.

WDC has been supporting OrcaLab for many years with the [Adopt an Orca Programme](#). Adopters get to know individual orcas from the Northern Resident population and help WDC and OrcaLab to protect these magnificent marine mammals.

# CANARY ISLANDS



## CANARY ISLANDS

Several hundred short-finned pilot whales are resident in the waters off Tenerife and La Gomera and their presence, along with bottlenose and Atlantic spotted dolphins, ensures this region's status as a global hotspot for whale watching. Further offshore, an abundance of other whale and dolphin species can be found: sperm whales, rare beaked whales and various dolphins. Of the 87 species of cetaceans known, 30 have been spotted around the Canary Islands. It is also one of the few places in the world where whale watching is possible all year round.

Country or region	Spain, Canary Islands											
Location:	Valle Gran Rey (La Gomera) Los Gigantes, Puerto Colon and Los Cristianos (Tenerife) Puerto Rico and Puerto Mogan (Gran Canaria) Tazacorte (La Palma) Los Corralejos (Fuerteventura) Playa Blanca, Puerto del Carmen (Lanzarote)											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Main species seen:	Bottlenose dolphin, short-finned pilot whale, Atlantic spotted dolphin											
Species occasionally seen:	Rough-toothed dolphin, common dolphin, striped dolphin, beaked whales, Bryde's whale, sei whale. Other large baleen whales come through the area, mainly in springtime											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Half-day trips, 2-4 hours  Licensed operators can be recognized by the yellow flag "Barco Azul"  Occasionally, bottlenose dolphins swim close to shore. If you have good binoculars, other species may be spotted further offshore											
Any concerns?	Careful research is necessary to find a responsibly-managed tour with a qualified naturalist on board. Lower quality trips are not uncommon, as for example on Tenerife.											
Added value:	In Vueltas (Valle Gran Rey) there is a permanent exhibition "Dolphins and Whales off La Gomera – Species Diversity in a Changing World", plus regular information events (films, talks, etc.) introducing the whale and dolphin species frequenting the waters off La Gomera.											

Atlantic spotted dolphin | Bryde's whale | Short-finned pilot whale



# CARIBBEAN: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



## CARIBBEAN: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic is probably the best-known location in the Caribbean to view whales and dolphins in their natural environment. Majestic humpback whales come to the region's warm and shallow waters in the winter months to mate and give birth. The Sanctuary for the Marine Mammals of the Dominican Republic, created in 1986, includes the main whale watching areas (Silver Bank, Navidad Bank and Samaná Bay) and covers over 19,000 square miles.

Country or region	Caribbean: Dominican Republic
Location:	Samaná, Puerto Plata
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D
Main species seen:	Humpback whale
Species occasionally seen:	Pantropical spotted dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, spinner dolphin, short-finned pilot whale, Atlantic spotted dolphin
Types of whale watching on offer:	 2-4 hour boat trips, multiple-day trips
Any concerns?	There are many operators to choose from. Careful research is needed to find a responsible company. For more information on how to find a responsible operator please see page 14 of this brochure. Several operators offer swimming with humpback whales (at Silver Bank) or dolphins at various locations. Please note that WDC does not encourage people to swim with any species of cetacean. For more information please see page 20 of this brochure.
Added value:	Whale Museum & Nature Centre, Samana

► Humpback whale | Atlantic spotted dolphin | Short-finned pilot whale



# GERMANY



Harbour porpoises in German waters



## GERMANY

In Germany, it is possible to observe harbour porpoises in various locations along the North and Baltic Seas, especially in coastal areas. There is a nursing area off the island of Sylt and harbour porpoises have also been observed in estuaries, such as those of the rivers Weser and Elbe and, in recent years, further upstream in the River Elbe. In the western Baltic Sea, they are a common sight, too.

Country or region	Germany											
Location:	Sylt, Fehmarn, Bay of Eckernförde and others											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Arten:	Harbour porpoise											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 There are occasional boat trips starting from Flensburg in summer.   In the summer the harbour porpoises can be observed from the shore. However, you need to be patient as these porpoises are very conspicuous.											
Any concerns?	Harbour porpoises in the North and Baltic Seas are facing a number of threats and should not be disturbed (if, for example, encountered on a boat trip).											
Added value:	There are several information centres along the coasts of both the North and Baltic Seas which provide additional information about marine life. Sightings of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea should be reported to the <a href="#">"Deutsches Meeresmuseum"</a> in Stralsund.											
Other good sites:	During the last couple of years, harbour porpoises have been observed in the rivers Weser, Ems, Jade and Elbe. With a bit of luck they can also be seen from the shoreline, especially around May. These sightings should also be reported to the <a href="#">"Deutsches Meeresmuseum"</a> in Stralsund.											

# ICELAND



Blue whale | Fin whale | White-beaked dolphin



## ICELAND

Iceland has become an increasingly popular whale watching destination in northern Europe, with 23 species of whales and dolphins recorded in these waters. Iceland's main whale watch season is the summer months; however, in recent years, orcas have been seen feeding close to shore off the Snæfellsnes peninsula during the winter months. Minke whales and endangered fin whales are not only watched by curious tourists, they are also targeted by whalers and minke whale meat is offered in many local restaurants. WDC strongly recommends that you do not support this industry! Look out for "whale friendly" restaurants, easily identified by a sticker in the window.

Country or region	Iceland
Location:	Húsavík (Nordost-Island); Reykjavík, Keflavík (Südwest-Island)
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D
Main species seen:	Minke whale, humpback whale, white-beaked dolphin
Species occasionally seen:	Blue whale, sperm whale, orca, harbour porpoise, fin whale; Atlantic white-sided dolphin and Northern bottlenose whale (mainly spotted in the North-East)
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Mainly half-day trips (3-4 hours)
Any concerns?	Unfortunately whaling is still taking place in Iceland and minke whale meat is offered to tourists in supermarkets and restaurants. Look out for "whale friendly" venues.
Added value:	Europe's largest whale exhibition "Whales of Iceland", in Reykjavík; meanwhile Húsavík offers a Whale Museum.
Other good sites:	Snæfellsnes peninsula: whale watching is possible in summer (from Olafsvík) and winter (from Grundarfjörður) with good orca sightings in late winter and spring in recent years.

# JAPAN



Orca | Minke whale | Whale watching in Japan



## JAPAN

Commercial whale watching started off the Ogasawara Islands, Southern Japan in the late 1980s and grew rapidly. Today, around 200 operators welcome an estimated 200,000 passengers each year. Unfortunately, Japanese whalers continue to kill whales in commercial hunts conducted in their national coastal and offshore waters. Drive hunts, which kill hundreds of dolphin species annually, are also widely condemned. Whale and dolphin watching, therefore, provides an important economic and ethical alternative to these hunts.

Country or region	Japan	
Location:	Muroran and Rausu, Hokkaido (May – August) Kuroshio, Kochi Pref.(April – October) Choshi, Chiba Pref. (May – September) Mikura island* (March – November) Ogasawara islands* (Feb – April for humpbacks; August – October for sperm whales) Okinawa and Zamami islands (February – April) Amami-Oshima (February – April)	
Best time to visit:	Varies according to location, see above	
Main species seen:	Varies according to location but includes: sperm whale, humpback whale, Bryde's whale, Rissos dolphin, finless porpoise, minke whale, Pacific white-sided dolphin, Dall's porpoise, orca, short-beaked common dolphin, common and Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin, spinner dolphin	
Species occasionally seen:	Short finned pilot whale, Northern right whale, spotted dolphin, Blainville's beaked whale, melon-headed whale, false killer whale	
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Mainly half-day and daytrips with various vessels, sightings from ferries possible  Various opportunities, for example Ogasawara	
Any concerns?	Japan continues to kill large numbers of whales and dolphins each year. Whale and dolphin meat is on sale – it is strongly recommended that you do not purchase or consume any whale or dolphin products as this encourages further hunting and much of the meat is contaminated with toxins.  * These locations also offer tours to swim with dolphins. Please note our concerns about swim tours, see page 20.	
Added value:	Ogasawara, Zamami and Kuroshio have excellent whale watching centres situated near the port. Ogasawara has one of the best land-based lookouts for whales in the world.	

# MEXICO: BAJA CALIFORNIA, GULF OF CALIFORNIA



Common dolphins | Blue whale | Common dolphins



## MEXICO: BAJA CALIFORNIA, GULF OF CALIFORNIA

Baja California, on Mexico's Pacific coast, is arguably one of the best places on the planet for whale watching, boasting over 20 whale and dolphin species. Here, grey whales can be observed in their breeding and calving grounds, as well as on their migration to and from their feeding grounds in the Arctic.

Country or region	Mexico											
Location:	Baja California (Laguna San Ignacio), Gulf of California											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Main species seen:	Grey whale (January – April) in the lagoons of Baja California and fin whale, humpback whale, sei whale and minke whale in the Gulf of California; also both common and bottlenose dolphin											
Species occasionally seen:	Blue whale, Bryde's whale, sperm whale, short-finned pilot whale, Pacific white-sided dolphin											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Day trips and multiple day excursions	 Possible observations from many lookouts along the coast										
Any concerns?												
	<p>Please make sure you choose a licensed operator with naturalists or guides on the boat. Beware of casual operators offering cheaper trips.</p> <p>As the grey whales often come very close to the boats in the lagoons, people are naturally tempted to touch them. Whilst WDC believes that these encounters are generally well-managed and positive, we recommend that passengers bear in mind that contact with a marine mammal may pose a small risk of injury or disease transmission to both parties.</p>											

# NEW ZEALAND: KAIKOURA



## NEW ZEALAND: KAIKOURA

Several dolphin species are frequently seen in the waters off New Zealand. In Kaikoura, on the South Island, it is also possible to encounter sperm whales all year round. The New Zealand dolphin (also known as the Hector's, or Maui's dolphin), one of the smallest of all dolphins, is unique to this part of the world. They can be encountered on boat-based trips from Akaroa (Banks Peninsula, South Island) but are also frequently seen surfing the waves at Porpoise Bay on the Southern tip of New Zealand's mainland.

Country or region	New Zealand
Location:	Kaikoura
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D Sperm whales can be seen year-round
Main species seen:	Sperm whale, dusky dolphin
Species occasionally seen:	Long-finned pilot whale, orca, New Zealand dolphin, common dolphin, bottlenose dolphin
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Half-day trips  30-minute scenic whale watch flights offered
Any concerns?	Swimming with dusky dolphins is offered in Kaikoura and with New Zealand dolphins in Akaroa. Please note that WDC does not encourage people to swim with any species of cetacean. For more information please see page 20 of this brochure.
Other good sites:	North Island: Bay of Islands, Bay of Plenty, Hauraki Gulf South Island: Akaroa, Fiordland, Marlborough Sounds, Tasman Bay, Westland

© Dusky dolphins bowriding | Sperm whale diving | Dusky dolphins off Kaikoura



# NORWAY



© Tomas Fjellanger/WDC Norway



## NORWAY

Until a few years ago, Tysfjord in northern Norway was the number one location to watch orcas hunting for herring. Then, when the herring stopped using the area and moved further offshore, orca sightings decreased. In recent years, the herring have moved to a new overwintering area in the fjord systems around Skjervoy: closely followed by the orcas, which now appear in the region in early winter before moving along the coast to the waters off Senja Island and Andfjorden in January and early February. This time, the orcas are often seen in the company of humpback whales and the occasional fin whale, as the winter feeding frenzy has quickly established itself at this new location. Sperm whales remain a regular sighting around Sto and Andenes, mostly during the summer months.

Unfortunately, minke whaling also takes place in Norwegian waters with hundreds of minke whales currently being killed each season.

Country or region	Norway																							
Location:	Skjervoy, Stø, Andenes, Senja Island																							
Best time to visit:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>J</td><td>F</td><td>M</td><td>A</td><td>M</td><td>J</td><td>J</td><td>A</td><td>S</td><td>O</td><td>N</td><td>D</td></tr> </table> November – January (for orcas and humpbacks, see below); and May – September (for sperm whales, see below)												J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D													
Main species seen:	Orca and humpback whale (Skjervoy and Senja: November – January; Andenes: December – February) Sperm whale (Stø and Andenes: mostly during the summer months)																							
Species occasionally seen:	Pilot whales, fin whales, minke whales. Sperm whales (Stø and Andenes: occasional sightings during winter months)																							
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Boat-based: 4-5 hour and longer tours																							
Any concerns?	Minke whaling is still taking place in Norway each summer and minke whale meat is offered to tourists in supermarkets and restaurants, and aboard visiting cruise ships. WDC strongly recommends that you do not purchase or consume whale meat as this only encourages further hunting.  Swim-with tours offering snorkelling with orcas and humpbacks in the winter months. WDC does not recommend taking part in these activities. For further information please turn to page 20 of this brochure.																							

# SOUTH AFRICA



© Michaela Hartel

Southern right whale | Humpback whale | Bryde's whale



## SOUTH AFRICA

The South African province of Western Cape in the south of the country offers great whale watching opportunities. Majestic southern right whales are the main species seen when they arrive on their migration from Antarctica to mate, give birth and nurse their young in the sheltered waters along the coast. Whales can be seen breaching (launching themselves out of the water), lobtailing (slapping their tail fin forcefully down on the surface of the water) or resting as close as 50 metres from shore. Thirty-seven species of whales and dolphins have been reported in the waters off South Africa.

Country or region	South Africa, Western Cape																						
Location:	Hermanus, Gansbaai, Kleinbaai																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Southern right whale (June – December), humpback whale (June – September), Bryde's whale (year-round with peak in summer)																						
Species occasionally seen:	Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphin and Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (year-round with a summer peak)																						
Types of whale watching on offer:	  	Mainly 2-3 hour trips on offer Southern right whales can be seen close to shore when walking along the Cliff Path. Guided whale watching walking tours are also on offer. 30-minute scenic flights over Walker Bay																					
Added value:	Hermanus has a Whale Museum; a "Whale Crier" (rather like a town crier, the Whale Crier announces when whales are around), and also an annual Whale Festival in September/October																						
Other good sites:	Plettenberg Bay, Mossel Bay, Lamberts Bay, Knysna																						

# SRI LANKA



Blue whale / Short-finned pilot whales / Sperm whales off Sri Lanka



## SRI LANKA

The Sri Lanka Tourist Board is proud to boast that nowhere else may one see the world's largest land mammal, the elephant, and the largest marine mammal, the blue whale, in a single day. Whilst mariners have reported the presence of whales in Sri Lankan waters for centuries, it is only in very recent years that commercial whale watching has become viable, beginning in Mirissa at the southern tip of the island, where sightings rate for blue whales can be as high as 90%. Two further locations, Kalpitiya in the north-west and Trincomalee to the north-east, have also developed whale and dolphin watching.

Country or region	Sri Lanka																							
Location:	Mirissa (south-west); Kalpitiya (north-west); Trincomalee (north-east)																							
Best time to visit:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>J</td><td>F</td><td>M</td><td>A</td><td>M</td><td>J</td><td>J</td><td>A</td><td>S</td><td>O</td><td>N</td><td>D</td></tr> </table>												J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D													
	<p>Mirissa and Kalpitiya: Best months are December-January and April (full season is late October – April)</p> <p>Trincomalee: December – April; and June – October (migrating whales)</p>																							
Main species seen:	Blue whale, sperm whale, spinner dolphin																							
Species occasionally seen:	<p>Pantropical spotted dolphin, striped dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, Risso's dolphin, short-finned pilot whale, orca, Bryde's whale</p> <p>Very occasionally: minke whale, humpback whale, pygmy sperm whale, dwarf sperm whale, Indo-Pacific finless porpoise, Cuvier's (and other species of) beaked whale, common dolphin, Fraser's dolphin, Melon-headed whale</p>																							
Types of whale watching on offer:	<p> Boat trips are mostly 3-5 hours, be prepared to leave harbour early (7am) to avoid midday heat and drink plenty of water!</p> <p> Especially Swami Rock, Trincomalee for blue and sperm whales</p> <p> Some aerial viewing from Mirissa</p>																							
Any concerns?	<p>Whale watching has taken off without adequate infrastructure in some locations leading to overcrowding and irresponsible behaviour. Swim-with blue whales (and other species) is developing but these should be avoided (as elsewhere) due to grave concerns about the safety and welfare of both people and whales. For further information on this topic please turn to page 20 of this brochure.</p>																							
Added value:	<p>WDC's Project BLUEprint has trained operators and promoted responsible vessel handling. High likelihood of also seeing a variety of other marine life including turtles, flying fish, sunfish and manta rays</p>																							

# USA: ALASKA



© Mark Simmonds  
Humpback whales feeding | Orca breaching | Humpback whales



## USA: ALASKA

Each year, humpback whales migrate from their breeding grounds in Hawaii and Mexico to feed in the cold waters off Alaska. Orcas also frequent the area and can sometimes be seen hunting for fish (resident ecotype) or marine mammals (transient ecotype). Whale watching in Alaska also includes breathtaking scenery: clear fjords surrounded by green mountains, glaciers and small, uninhabited islands.

Country or region	USA, Alaska
Location:	Juneau
Best time to visit:	J F M A <b>M</b> <b>J</b> <b>J</b> <b>A</b> <b>S</b> <b>O</b> <b>N</b> <b>D</b>
Main species seen:	Humpback whale, orca
Species occasionally seen:	Minke whale, Dall's porpoise, harbour porpoise, fin whale, sperm whale
Types of whale watching on offer:	3-4 hour trips
Any concerns?	There are many operators to choose from. Make sure you research carefully to find a responsible operator.  Many cruise ships also transit this area.
Added value:	WDC is a partner in Whale SENSE, a responsible whale watching programme, and accredited operators can be found in Juneau and other Southeast Alaska locations. They undergo annual training and evaluation to ensure they operate responsibly and deliver conservation messages to their passengers.
Other good sites:	Glacier Bay, Prince William Sound

# USA: CENTRAL CALIFORNIA



Common dolphins | Humpback whale fluke | Grey whale



## USA: CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary offers great whale and dolphin watching opportunities all year round. Due to the submarine canyons close to shore, it is not necessary to go out very far before you have the chance of meeting several whale and dolphin species. Twenty-seven of the 87 species of whales and dolphins known to date have been encountered in this area.

Country or region	USA, California																						
Location:	Monterey, Moss Landing, Santa Cruz, San Simeon, San Francisco																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Grey whale (December – June), humpback whale, blue whale (April – November), minke whale, orca, Pacific white-sided dolphin, bottlenose dolphin (year round)																						
Species occasionally seen:	Risso's dolphin, Northern right whale dolphin, Dalls's porpoise, harbour porpoise																						
Types of whale watching on offer:		2-3 hour trips																					
																							
Any concerns?	Kayaking tours to see whales and dolphins are also on offer. Although it might be tempting, please note that getting close to a whale is dangerous for both people and whale. Always keep a safe distance to avoid disturbing marine mammals.																						
Added value:	Sanctuary Exploration Center, Santa Cruz and Coastal Discovery Center, San Simeon, The Whale Trail (multiple locations)																						
Other good sites:	Other whale watching sites in California include Dana Point, Fort Bragg, Mendocino, San Diego, Morro Bay, Point Dume State Beach, Channel Islands and Point Vicente.																						

# USA: GULF OF MAINE



Feeding humpback whales | Watching a humpback breach | Fin whale



## USA: GULF OF MAINE

The Gulf of Maine is a prime feeding ground for humpback whales in the North Atlantic. Nearly 1,000 individual humpback whales return seasonally to these waters, some of whom have been documented for more than forty years, making them one of the best-studied marine mammal populations in the world. In summer, the main whale watching season, sightings are almost guaranteed and often include humpback whales feeding or exhibiting other exciting behaviours at the surface: a spectacular sight! Other whale, dolphin, and seal species also frequent the area.

Country or region	USA, New England																						
Location:	Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire																						
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D																						
Main species seen:	Humpback whale, fin whale, minke whale (April – October), North Atlantic right whale (April – May)																						
Species occasionally seen:	Atlantic white-sided dolphin, short beaked common dolphin, sei whale, harbour porpoise																						
Types of whale watching on offer:	 	3-4 hour trips																					
		North Atlantic right whales can typically be seen in Cape Cod Bay from shore in April – May																					
Any concerns?	There are many operators to choose from. Make sure you research carefully to find a responsible company which participates in Whale SENSE (whalesense.org) please see below.																						
Added value:	 Look out for Whale SENSE accredited operators as these undergo annual training and evaluation to ensure they operate responsibly and deliver conservation messages to their passengers. New England is steeped in history and features many beautiful lighthouses, some of which are passed during a whale watching trip. Cape Cod is a designated National Seashore which protects many pristine sandy beaches. Close proximity to the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.																						

# USA: HAWAII



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## USA: HAWAII

The waters off Hawaii are an important breeding and calving ground for humpback whales. Each year around Christmas time, the whales return from their feeding grounds in the cold waters off Alaska to mate and give birth to their young. Several energetic and acrobatic dolphin species are also found in these waters.

Country or region	USA, Hawaii												
Location:	Maui Nui, Oahu, Kauai, Hawaii												
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D												
Main species seen:	Humpback whale (November – May); bottlenose dolphin, spinner dolphin, Pantropical spotted dolphin (all year round)												
Species occasionally seen:	Beaked whales, short-finned pilot whale, false killer whale												
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Half-day trips, day trips, longer expeditions	 Around December, it is possible to watch the arrival of humpback whales from shore, or even from your hotel room!											
Any concerns?													
Added value:	 Particularly look out for Dolphin SMART companies (WDC is a partner), as these operators are recognized for their conservation efforts.												
	Check whether there is a hydrophone available on board to listen to the famous songs of the humpback whales!												
	You can also visit the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center in Kihei (Maui). Every year during the whale watching season there are several festivals taking place which are dedicated to the whales.												

# USA: SAN JUAN ISLANDS



## USA: SAN JUAN ISLANDS

The San Juan Islands, in the U.S. state of Washington, are an archipelago of hundreds of islands, rocks, and reefs in the Pacific Northwest. Four of these islands are accessible by ferry and offer great possibilities to see the endangered Southern Resident orcas from shore during the summer months.

Country or region	USA, Washington State											
Location:	Friday Harbor, Lime Kiln Point State Park (San Juan Island)											
Best time to visit:	J F M A M J J A S O N D											
Main species seen:	Orca (mainly May – October; Southern Resident population and transient ecotype) Humpback whale (mainly July – September)											
Species occasionally seen:	Grey whale (March – June); harbour porpoise, Dall's porpoise, Pacific white-sided dolphin, minke whale											
Types of whale watching on offer:	 Half-day trips, whales and dolphins occasionally seen from ferry											
	 Lime Kiln Point State Park ("Whale Watch Park"), San Juan County Park, American Camp, South Beach and Cattle Point Lighthouse											
Any concerns?	A large number of operators offer trips to see the endangered Southern Resident orca population. As Lime Kiln Point State Park (also known as „Whale Watch Park“) and other locations on San Juan Island offer great opportunities to view this small population from shore, WDC recommends land-based whale watching here. For further information, please see page 22 of this brochure.											
Added value:	"Whale Museum" in Friday Harbor, Visitor Centre at Lime Kiln Point State Park (also called "Whale Watch Park"), The Whale Trail (multiple locations), Langley Whale Center (Whidbey Island)											
Other good sites:	Orcas Island, Lopez Island (part of the San Juan Islands archipelago), Port Townsend, Port Angeles, Anacortes, Westport, Whidbey Island, Seattle, Bainbridge and Vashon Islands											

Whale Museum in Friday Harbor, San Juan Island | Southern Resident orca | In the South of San Juan Island



## FURTHER INFORMATION



## USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Information on whale and dolphin watching on the WDC website](#)
- [Whale watching handbook of the International Whaling Commission](#)
- [Whale SENSE – Promoting responsible whale watching](#)
- [Dolphin SMART](#)
- [See A Spout, Watch Out!](#)
- [Whale-watching: More than meets the Eyes \(2013\)](#)

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