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Wild Dolphin Conservation Program Expands along Florida's West Coast
Tour Operators in St. Petersburg and Ft. Myers Earn Dolphin SMART Recognition

NOAA and its partners have expanded the Dolphin SMART conservation program to Fort Myers, Sarasota, and Tampa Bay, Fla. Dolphin SMART is a program that awards annual recognition to tour operators who responsibly view wild dolphins and educate their patrons on dolphin conservation.

The following tour businesses are the first in southwest Florida to earn the Dolphin SMART recognition: [Adventure Cruises](#), [Ft. Desoto Eco-Adventures](#), and [Shell Key Shuttle](#) in the St. Petersburg area; and [Tarpon Bay Explorers](#) and [Banana Bay Tour Company](#) in the Ft. Myers area. Dolphin SMART originated in Key West, Fla., in 2007 and expanded to Orange Beach, Ala., in 2008 before launching in southwest Florida this year.

"Dolphin SMART tour operators are committed to conserving the health of local dolphin populations," said Jessica Powell, NOAA Fisheries Dolphin SMART regional coordinator. "Visitors who book with a Dolphin SMART operator can feel confident that they are participating in responsible tourism."

NOAA encourages visitors to southwest Florida, the Florida Keys, and Alabama to book with a Dolphin SMART operator. Vessels of participating operators carry a Dolphin SMART flag and decal with current calendar year. A list of Dolphin SMART operators is available online at www.dolphinSMART.org.

Viewing dolphins from a responsible distance is a cornerstone of the Dolphin SMART program. Close viewing of wild dolphins may disrupt important natural behaviors such as feeding, nursing and resting, and result in negative impacts to the health of dolphin groups and their young.

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,
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
- Refrain from feeding, touching, or swimming with wild dolphins,
- Teach 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.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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