

Panama City Wild Dolphin Tours Etiquette Program released by the B.T.F. (B.A.D.T.O.F.E.E.D.) Bay Association of Dolphin Tour Operators For Environmental Education Distinction

BadtoFeed is a cooperation effort between the Dolphin Tour Industry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, the Tourist Development Council (TDC), Gulf World Marine Park, the marine mammal science community, local media, the hospitality industry and the community of Bay County.

The Panama City Wild Dolphin Tours Etiquette Program leads to an educational training course for Dolphin Tour Operators and their staff.

The Program is managed by the local tour industry and addresses its long term needs and direction. It focuses on a sustainable recreational usage of the Emerald Coast's Marine resources and particularly on the interaction with the local population of wild bottlenose dolphins.

The Program's goals are:

To establish a cooperative relationship between the stakeholders within the Tour Industry, the State and Federal Agencies regulating the interaction with wildlife, the marine mammal science community, the local media and the County's Tourism Development Council and the Gulf Coast's hospitality industry for the promotion of a responsible interaction with one of Bay County's most coveted natural resources: the local population of wild bottlenose dolphins. To show and explain the long term value and the benefits of concerted educative tour management strategies geared towards a sustainable marine tourism.

How

Design, introduce, broadcast, implement and enforce specific guidelines for dolphin tour operators. B.T.F. is offering a training course leading to a "B.T.F Responsible Dolphin Tour Operator Memorandum of Agreement". Participation in this training course is one of the requirements to be part of B.T.F. This educational training course has the support of the TDC, Gulf World, FWC and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement though the involvement of these parties is limited to volunteering their time to specific aspects of the program like instruction and media exposure. Completion of the training course is in no way a permit or a license to harass wild dolphins and the participants are still subject to all regulations concerning the interaction with marine mammals. Compliant operators will be recognized on the TDC website as "Responsible Dolphin Tour Operators". A distinctive recognition sticker is affixed to the participating vessels and captains licenses.

Benefits

In less than 6 months, the BadToFeed program and the stepped up enforcement efforts by FWC have substantially decreased the level of wild dolphin harassment in Panama City Beach. In the long run, this will help to stabilize the wild dolphins natural group composition and

distribution. It already has and will keep minimizing the risk of injuries to both humans and dolphins. This program offers operators a unique opportunity to enhance the quality of their tours to include a conservation and protection outlook. This added value will give them an edge on other tour companies and in the long run give them a chance to become the leaders in this industry. This program will improve the negative image Panama City has acquired through the years concerning wild dolphin harassment.

The strongest drive for this program is that it is designed, implemented and controlled by the industry (the participating tour operators), giving them a sense of pride, independence and ownership that no other program could achieve.

Background

Please read the full article serving as basis for this action:

<http://www.waterplanetusa.com/images/NoFeedWebNew.pdf>

Conditions for eligibility

Participating business owners commit to conform to the Association's guidelines. Participants will only use and hire captains, who have successfully completed the original training course or attended the online course and successfully passed the online quizzes.

Content Overview of the training course

3 modules lasting an approximately 2.5 hours. The original BadtoFeed Training Course took place on April 10, 2013. The content of the training course includes: Definition, Value and Direction of Marine Tourism Worldwide and in Panama City. Dolphin Physiology, Biology, Behavior and Social Life. Feeding Wild Dolphins. The safety, legal and ethical Aspects.

Occasional guest speakers from the scientific community will be invited throughout the year.

Note: For a complete picture of the program, please visit our web site at

<http://badtofeed.com/>

The volunteer instructors for the B.T.F. training course are: Denis Richard (Water Planet) – Elsa M. Haubold, Ph.D. (FWC Division of Habitat and Species Conservation) - Major Bruce Cooper (Regional Commander for the FWC's Northwest Region) - Special agent Gregg Houghaboom (NOAA) - Kristin L. Stewart Ph.D, JD (Marine Mammal Laws and Policies) – Dr. Lydia Staggs (Marine Mammal Veterinarian at Gulf World Marine Park) - Dan Blasko (Head Trainer at Gulf World Marine Park), Secret Holmes (Director of Training and Animal Husbandry at Gulf World Marine Park)

TDC leaders and State Law Enforcement Representatives will help with securing media coverage for the public release of the program.

The cost of the first year's training program will be covered by donations and sponsorships. For the following years, the program will be funded by the tour operators and by fundraising within the hospitality industry and local businesses.

Here is the list (in alphabetical order) of the businesses, who have committed to participate in this program: Aquatic Adventures - Bay Point Watersports - Blue Dolphin Tours/Island Time - Captain Erik Gerace - Dolphin Tours & More - Go Flipper Go – Grand Lagoon Watersports – Shell Island Waverunner - Sunshine Watersports - Water Planet.

Denis Richard

Water Planet – President

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