



DATES: 25TH SEPTEMBER - 5 OCTOBER 2024

TONGA

Humpback Whale Photography Trip 2024

SWIMMING WITH GENTLE GIANTS

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What emotions would you feel if an animal that is 50 feet long and weighing over 80,000 pounds approached you underwater? You never know how you are going to react until you are in that situation. To see the eye of the mother looking back at you, assessing the situation of whether you are a threat to her calf or not. The ultimate compliment is when the mom brings her calf over to you, allowing it to approach you and interact with you. After this moment unfolded, we ended up spending another three hours with this mom and her calf. Frankly, I think the mom is just relieved for her calf to have some new friends and new toys to play with. Every time we did a body roll underwater, the calf would do a body roll in response. I have never been one to believe that I can talk to a whale but I do know if you show them immense respect, peaceful body language, calm energy then at some point they will let you into their world.

PAUL NICKLEN, PHOTOGRAPHER + CO-FOUNDER, SEALEGACY



SWIM WITH WHALES IN TONGA

Join us for a once in a life time experience on an exclusive trip to interact with humpback whales in Tonga. Swim in the blue waters, amongst the presence of humpback whales and snorkel the vast coral reefs full of marine life. This trip aims to showcase the gentle giants of the sea and give you a chance to photograph some incredible and intimate moments with the whales.

Brooke is partnering with award winning photographer Scott Portelli to run this trip. He has over 20yrs of experience swimming with whales in Tonga. His business 'Swimming With Gentle Giants' (www.swimmingwithgentlegiants.com) has global reputation as a superior operator in the area. So we are certainly going to be in good hands with his crew out on the sapphire waters of Tonga.

Humpback whales give birth in the tropical waters of Vava'u to ensure the safety of their new born calves. You will be witness to the bond between a mother and calf and witness the unique behaviour that can only be experienced by observing these amazing creatures in their natural environment. Humpback males escort the mother and calves waiting for the opportunity to mate before heading back to the Antarctic waters to feed. Your day is filled with excitement and admiration, only stopping to explore the coral gardens and abundant marine life that inhabits Tonga.

During the trip you will also learn photography fundamentals and photo editing with Brooke, all up the trip will be a full on photographic experience for any anyone who wishes to further their skill set while experiencing the magical of humpback whales in the crystal clear waters of Tonga. This trip caters for all photography levels, even if you just want to experience the whales themselves you are welcome to join.

Tonga is one of only a few places in the world where you can swim with Humpback whales. And the regulations state clearly that only 4 people and a licensed guide can be in the water with the whales at any one time. We don't scuba dive with the whales, only snorkel and practice a soft approach to interactions with these amazing mammals.

This trip will cater for a small private group of only 6 people so be sure to secure your spot.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- 10 Nights Accommodation in shared house
- Ocean front accommodation with views over the harbour
- Photography Fundamentals Workshop
- Editing Workshop Using Adobe Lightroom
- 7 Days on the water swimming with humpbacks
- Possibility of other cetacean and marine life interactions
- Daily snorkeling on reefs and in caves
- On board Marine Biologist and guide
- Small Group of only 6 Guests
- Morning tea, lunch and refreshments while on the water
- Professional photos from the trip provided by Brooke Pyke
- Underwater Photography Manual PDF Book
- Photography advice and guidance
- Pick ups daily from your accommodation
- Airport transfers in Vava'u.

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Underwater Camera Hire
- Editing Software/Laptop
- Travel Insurance/camera insurance
- Snorkeling Equipment
- Flights, local transport
- Food and drink while not on the boat

(See full list of what to bring with you)





ABOUT TONGA

Located in Oceania, it is an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean, directly south of Samoa and about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand. Its 171 islands, 45 of them inhabited, are divided into three main groups – Vava'u, Ha'apai, and Tongatapu – and cover an 800-kilometre (500-mile)-long north-south line.

The largest island, Tongatapu, on which the capital city of Nuku'alofa is located, covers 257 square kilometers (99 sq mi). Geologically, the Tongan islands are of two types: most have a limestone base formed from uplifted coral formations; others consist of limestone overlaying a volcanic base.

The waters surrounding the islands are a popular nursing, mating and resting ground for humpback whales during their winter migration. But you can also see dolphins, pilot whales and on a few occasions whale sharks, sperm whales and manta rays. The reef itself is full of abundant tropical fish life and corals. There are beautiful landscapes and wildlife to explore above water too. There is definitely no shortage of activities for nature lovers who visit the region.



TRIP ITINERARY

25th September to 5th October 2024

The success of our trips is very much depending on the whales and weather conditions. Two things which are beyond our control. However, many years of experience has showed us that the period we operate these trips give the best chances for a great experience.

Day 1 Arrival (Flight) - Photography Workshop

Our driver will be waiting for you at the airport and will take you to your accommodation (Check-in 1pm). Learn some photography fundamentals in a workshop with Brooke Pyke. In the evening your guides will meet you and give you a briefing about the upcoming tour and what to expect during your time in Tonga.

Day 2-4 Swim with whales

Pickup from your accommodation for a day of whale watching & snorkeling.

Day 5 – Day of rest (Sunday) - Editing Workshop

Sunday's are a day of rest in Tonga, so its a great time catch up on a good book or just relax on a beach. Brooke will also run a photo editing workshop so you can practice editing your photos with adobe Lightroom.

Day 6-9 Swim with whales

Pickup from your accommodation for a day of whale watching & snorkeling.

Day 10 – Leisure Day or (Alternate Flight Departure)

Spend the day exploring the islands, snorkeling, diving, hiking or just relaxing on a beach. There are plenty of activities to keep you entertained. If you have a flight booked for (Friday) we will organise a transfer to the Airport.

Day 11 Departure (Flight)

Our driver will be waiting for you at your accommodation to take you to the airport (Checkout 10am). As flight schedules can change, we recommend confirming your flights the day before you leave.

Tonga Time

The schedule above is a guide and things change often when you are on an Island in Tonga. The locals are on what we call 'Tonga Time', so don't be disappointed if the skipper is late, or your meals are not served on time, or you don't get exactly what you ask for, just relax and enjoy this tropical paradise.



How do I get to Tonga?

You can fly into the main island of Tonga which is called **Tongatapu**. The capital city is called **Nuku'alofa** and the international airport is called **Fua'amotu International Airport**.

Then there is a local airline currently running domestic flights between Tongatapu and Vava'u.

Nuku'alofa is accessible by flights only from Australia (Virgin Australia), New Zealand (Air New Zealand) and Fiji (Fiji Airways).

Your tour departs in **Vava'u**, Fiji Airways flies direct on certain days and has opened up some new flights to accommodate guests flying via Nadi into Vava'u. Please check with Fiji Airways for the most direct route.

How do I get to my tour base on Vava'u?

You can get to **Vava'u** on short domestic flights with Lulutai Airlines airlines form the main Island of Tongatapu.

Flights to look for are Tongatapu -> Vava'U Lupepau'U flight options. Or you can fly direct from Fiji to Vava'u on Wednesday's and Saturdays.



FAQ



ARE THERE MANY OPTIONS FOR BREAKFAST AND DINNER?

Depending on where you stay, breakfast is included in some places, or you can buy basics from the local supermarket (bread, fruit, muesli). Lunch is provided on the boat. For dinners we usually go to restaurant or cafes.

There are a number of nice cafes and restaurants that have a good range of food to choose from, you won't go hungry.

CAN I DRINK THE TAP WATER?

Generally tap water in Tonga is safe, and the rainwater is usually great. We encourage our guests to bring a reusable bottle, as Tonga's small infrastructure has limited capacity to deal with lots of plastic bottles. If you're concerned, it's a good idea to bring a UV sterilising pen, filter bottle or purification tablets.

DO WE NEED TO BRING FOOD ON THE BOAT?

Lunch and snacks (including morning and afternoon tea) are provided, as well as water. While we do have water available on board, it's a good idea to bring your own reusable bottle (to use less plastic). While we try to cater to specific dietary requirements, supplies in Tonga are limited so please bring backups if necessary.

CAN YOU MEET CERTAIN DIETARY REQUIREMENTS?

Tonga doesn't have a lot of variety when it comes to catering for vegetarian or other dietary requirements, and although you will find cafes and restaurants that can make a special meal, it is often good to have a bit of a backup. There are the staple foods available (sugar, bread, pasta, potatoes, rice, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber, watermelon, bananas, apples, eggs, onions, pepper) as well as some variety in the restaurants.

WHERE DO WE GO FOR FOOD / MEALS?

Depending on where you stay, breakfast is included in some places, or you can buy basics from the local supermarket (bread, fruit, muesli). Lunch is provided on the boat. For dinners we usually go to a local restaurant or cafe.

DO WE NEED OUR DIVE CERTIFICATE TO SWIM WITH THE WHALES?

No. We only snorkel with the whales as there are specific rules that prohibit us from diving with them. The whales often stay close to the shallows or on the surface of the water, so there is no need to dive.

WHAT WILL THE INTERACTIONS BE LIKE WITH THE WHALES?

The interactions can last 1 minute or 1 hour depending on how comfortable the whales are, but expect to get up close and personal with them at some stage on your trip. Only 4 guests with 1 guide are allowed in the water at one time. The two groups of 4 plus your guide will be alternated so that everyone gets equal opportunity with the whales.

HOW LONG DO WE SPEND OUT ON THE WATER EACH DAY?

Approximately 7 hours per day. The time we spend in the water depends on the whales, weather and location. There are numerous snorkeling spots that we will try and stop at each day during lunch.

WILL THERE BE OPPORTUNITIES TO SWIM WITH OTHER MARINE MAMMALS?

We often see dolphins, pilot whales and on a few occasions whale sharks, sperm whales and manta rays. You never know what you might come across.

DO WE GET TO SNORKEL AROUND THE ISLANDS?

We try to snorkel every day in the pristine coral reefs, amazing caves and blue sapphire water that surrounds the islands.

WHAT ARE THE FITNESS REQUIREMENTS?

There are no age restrictions, but participants should be able to swim a hundred meters comfortably, and be confident snorkeling in open ocean that may sometime get choppy. We endeavor to stay close to the islands in calmer waters, and will usually be able to avoid any rough seas.

DO I NEED VACCINATIONS? ARE THERE HEALTH ISSUES THERE?

Due to Covid-19 this may be a requirement from 2021. You don't generally need vaccinations for Tonga and there is no Malaria. There are lots of mosquitoes, so we recommend bringing a good repellent with you.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN MY GROUP?

There is a maximum of 6 people on any tour, and a maximum of 4 people in the water (plus a guide) at one time.

ARE WE GUARANTEED TO SEE A WHALE?

I have had 98% success rate over the last 20 years, and while some days on the water can be more difficult than others, you will definitely see whales both above and below the water.

IS THERE A GUIDE ON BOARD?

As well as a certified guide and experienced whale swim leader, there is a Tongan skipper and Tongan guide on the boat with us. All of our crew and guides are licensed, which is important both for your safety and for the whales. Additionally, we pride ourselves on how experienced, friendly and knowledgeable our local crew are.

FAQ CONTINUED



ARE THE FLIGHTS RELIABLE?

The flights are not always reliable and it's best to give yourself a buffer day before and after your trip. Fiji Airways can often arrive without the passenger's luggage so always worth checking this before you leave Nadi. When flying inter-island, they have a tendency to change the flight times and not informing you before your flight, so it's best to check regularly with the airline.

DO I NEED TRAVEL INSURANCE?

It is very important that you have travel insurance as Tonga is a place where many things change that can affect your travel arrangements. Travel insurance will cover you for loss of baggage and changes to flights outside your control as well as possible tour cancellations.

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VISA REQUIREMENTS

For most travelers you will not require a visa to enter Tonga and you will be allowed up to 31 days. There are however some countries that require a visa prior to arrival. For more detailed information check out the Tonga tourism website here: <http://www.tongaholiday.com/visa-requirements/>

WHAT DOES THE DAILY SCHEDULE LOOK LIKE?

Our days are flexible so we can enjoy and accommodate the wild nature of the humpback whales. As a rough guide, 7:30am: Pick up from your accommodation. Lunch will be served on the boat, time will depend on the whale activity. 2:30pm: Usually we begin to wrap up time with the whales and head for a snorkel at a beautiful reef. 2:30 - 3:30pm: We will return to your accommodation to relax and grab a warm shower before dinner.

DO I NEED TO BE AN EXPERIENCED PHOTOGRAPHER TO JOIN?

This trip caters for beginners up to professionals. Even if you just want to swim with whales or have only a basic set up or gopro that is fine too. This trip is for anyone who loves the ocean and wants a once in a life time experience. The photography aspect is just an added bonus for this trip.

IS THERE INTERNET ACCESS?

Internet is slow, but you can do emails in town at most of the restaurants. Or you can buy SIM cards with 4-5gb data plans to use from your place. Make sure your phone is unlocked, otherwise you may have issues with the SIM card working.

IS IT EASY TO GET AROUND THE ISLAND?

Everything in the village (market, shops etc) is in walking distance, including Mt Talau (with views over the islands and village. If you'd like to explore further afield I can help organise to rent a car.

SET UP YOUR LOCAL SIM CARD

Once you have purchased a local SIM card from TCC or Digicel, you need to make sure you turn off all your phone apps before you top up the phone credit. Once you have credit on your phone, you need to go through the prompts to set up Data on your phone for Internet. This involves calling *120# and then following the prompts for a Data Plan. If you don't do this, your Internet will use your phone credit and run out very quickly. Consult with TCC or Digicel to help set up these plans.

TOP-UP CREDIT ON YOUR LOCAL SIM

A good service for Top-Up of credit on any number is via the website ding.com This will allow you to Top-Up any number around the world with credit

IF I'M TRANSFERRING IN TONGATAPU OVERNIGHT, WHERE SHOULD I STAY?

There are lots of accommodation options in Tongatapu. I usually stay at Winnie's Guesthouse. Aloft Airport Accommodation is also simple and convenient to the airport if you have a short stay.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DO IN TONGA?

There are a number of activities that Tonga has to whet your appetite, including diving, sailing, kayaking and quad biking to name a few. Although there are a number of operators in Vava'u, below is a list that we recommend:

There are few diving operators that provide some of the best diving options in Vava'u. They also offer PADI dive courses, snorkeling tours and whale-watching tours. Located on the waterfront in Neiafu Harbour, they have teams of professionals with local knowledge of some of the best dive sites in Vava'u.

Beluga Diving
<http://www.belugadivingvavau.com/>

Tongan Expeditions
<http://www.tonganexpeditions.com>

WHAT TO BRING

- Camera with wide angle or fisheye lens, Underwater Housing
- Camera with zoom lens (optional for above water whale photos)
- Spare batteries, SD cards, charger cables etc
- Adobe Lightroom Classic Editing Software
- Portable HD for back ups
- Laptop Computer
- Snorkeling Equipment (mask, snorkel and fins)
- Exposure protection such as 3mm wetsuit
- Spray jacket and warm sweater
- Warm weather clothes
- Swim wear
- Your personal Items
- Basic first aid kit and any personal medications
- Reef Safe Suncream
- Sunhat and sunglasses
- Sense of Adventure
- Beach Towel
- Seasick medication (for those prone to it)
- Insect repellent
- Carry Bag for camera
- Reusable water bottle with filter
- Arm/wrist lanyard for underwater camera
- Any other items you deem necessary for the trip

WEATHER AND WATER TEMP

Tonga is tropical so it's usually quite hot during the day, although there can be wind or sometimes rain. Average temperatures range between 20°C and 28°C (June - September). Temperature varies at night, it can be quite humid, but generally it's cool in the evenings, around 20°C. The sea in Tonga is warm all year round, usually between 24°C and 27°C. Tonga is a tropical island so it rains mainly in the night, but rain does not stop us from going out. We are on the water all the time, no matter what conditions, and weather is not a problem. The water temperature ranges between 25.5 - 27°C. We recommend a 3mm wetsuit as you may get cold for extended periods in the water.



What do the photography workshops cover?

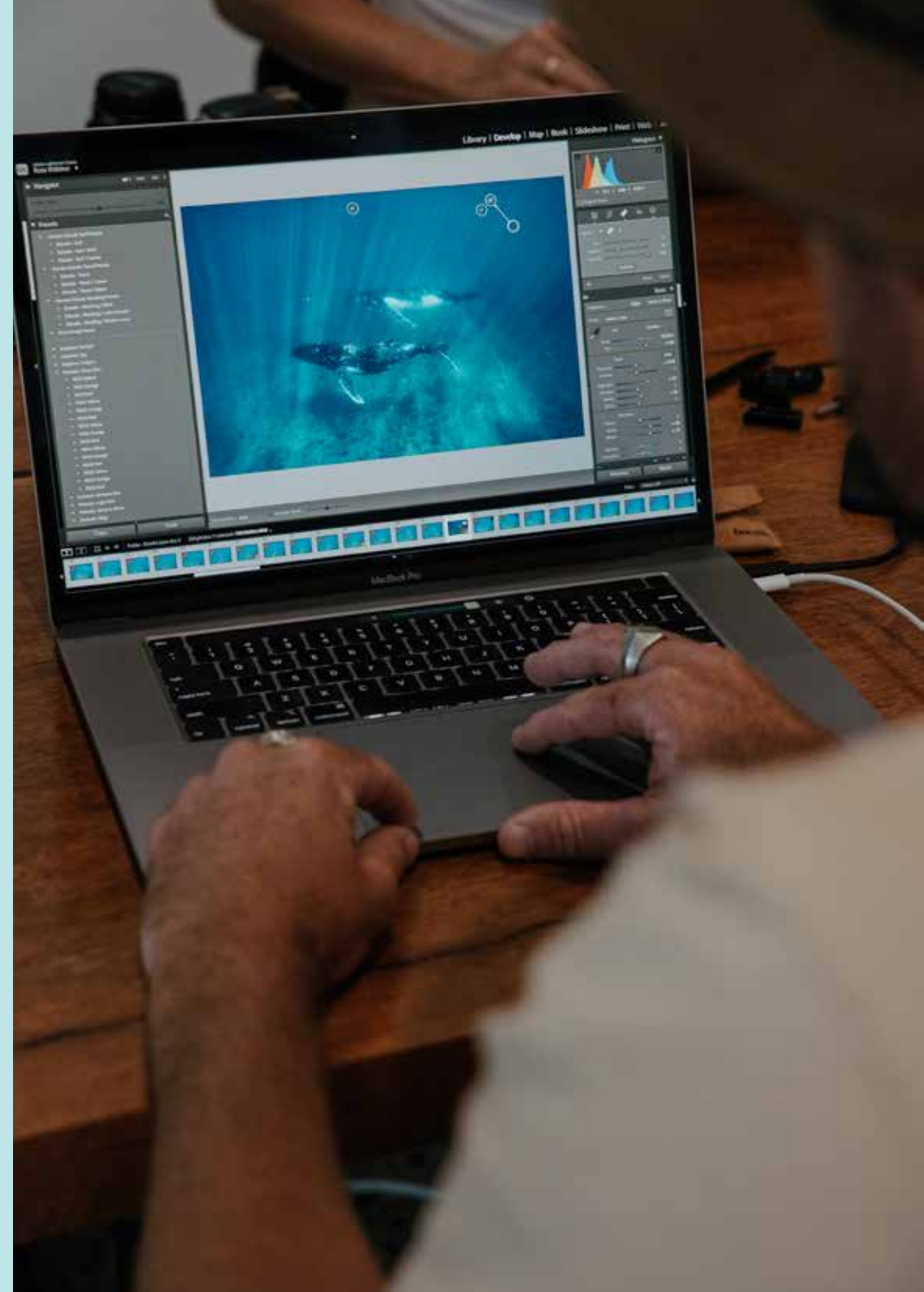
Photography Fundamentals Workshop - Day 1

- The art of underwater photography
- Importance and power of photography
- What makes a good photo "good"
- Common photography mistakes
- Importance of RAW files and back ups
- Understanding your camera settings
- Understanding Composition
- Underwater photography fundamentals
- Using ambient light underwater
- Subject approach and positioning
- In water safety and wildlife interactions
- Equipment care and maintenance

Photography Editing Workshop - Day 5

- How to back up and store your files
- How to follow a 'workflow'
- Understanding importance of editing in RAW
- Introduction into editing tools in Lightroom
- How to correct white balance for ambient light
- How to colourgrade your images
- Using masks to edit
- Making editing presets
- Making export presets
- How to export your files

During the editing workshop you will also get some time to sit down with Brooke and go over some of your photos for feedback and assistance in editing them. She will provide some tips to help you improve and give constructive feedback. While out on the boat swimming with the whales Brooke will be there in case you have any questions or need assistance with camera settings during the trip. In preparation for the trip you will also be provided with a copy of Brooke's underwater photography manual PDF for some pre-study.



What camera set up do I need?

The level of camera you bring with you is very much up to you and what suits your budget and needs.

COMPACT & BUDGET FRIENDLY

Even if you just want to capture some memories on a gopro or small point and shoot camera while mainly focusing on enjoying the experience this is totally fine too! Below are some options that could work for you.

- GoPro with housing
- DJI Action Camera with housing
- Olympus TG6 with housing
- Nikon Coolpix

PROFESSIONAL SET UPS

If you really want to immerse yourself into the world of underwater photography and gain as much experience and knowledge as possible during the trip. Below are some options for you to consider.

For capturing professional shots, choosing the right set up is important. Whether it is full frame or cropped sensor, mirrorless or DSLR. Make sure your set up has the ability to shoot in full manual mode, ability to access all functions while in the housing is possible and you have a wide angle lens with appropriate lens port.

For options on a camera set up whether it's compact, mirrorless or DSLR please visit the following online resource:

www.uwphotographyguide.com/digital-underwater-cameras

PLEASE ALSO NOTE:

- This trip will focus on ambient light photography
- There will be no need to additional lighting nor strobes
- Make sure you have pressure tested your set up before you depart
- Prior practice with your setup will hugely benefit you



HOW TO BOOK Tonga Trip 2024



TO BOOK YOUR SPACE EMAIL: oceanicbrooke@gmail.com

TRIP COST PER PERSON

Total tour cost = \$7,900 USD per person

Deposit USD \$1000 (This is non-refundable)

Note: All costs are in United States Dollars

Deposit due: 7 days from confirmation. Spaces will be held on a first come basis. No holds without deposit.

Second payment \$2,900

Due: 15th March

Final Payment \$4,000

Due 30th June

Payment can be made by Bank Transfer, PayPal (+3.5% fee) or credit card (+2.8% fee). Amex not accepted.

Please make sure you have read the booking terms and conditions.



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Terms & Conditions For Swimming With Whales And Other Cetaceans

Tour departures are subject to weather conditions.

Please be aware that our tours are with migrating or resident wild animals in their natural environment and guests should not assume that Swimming with Gentle Giants has any control over the whales appearance or behaviour. Our crew will make every effort to ensure the best possible whale encounters on the day and based on previous experience we work on a better than 95% success rate, however, there are no guarantees or refunds in the event of not swimming with or sighting whales.

Cancellation Period

Cancellation of a booking or part thereof will incur the following fees based on the notice period prior to any tour. Once travel has commenced, no refunds will be made for any unused services and clients will be responsible for their travel arrangements and insurance.

A deposit for any tour is made upon booking to secure your place on the tour, this is non-refundable. By paying the invoice for deposit you accept these terms and conditions.

If a cancellation is made less than 1 months (30 Days) prior to the tour date, we will not reimburse the cost of the tour.

If a cancellation is made within 1-2 months (60 Days) prior to the tour date, we will reimburse the cost of the tour up to 10% minus the deposit which is non refundable upon booking the tour and any admin fees incurred.

If a cancellation is made within 3 months (90 Days) prior to the tour date we will reimburse the cost of the tour up to 15% minus the deposit which is non refundable upon booking the tour and any admin fees incurred.

If a cancellation is made within 3 – 6 months (180 Days) prior to the tour date we will reimburse the cost of the tour up to 40% minus the deposit which is non refundable upon booking the tour and any admin fees incurred.

Cancellations made by Swimming with Gentle Giants to a tour will be reimbursed in full (Not including the deposit which is Non-refundable).

Canceled days during tours

If for any reason weather or operational cancellation of a single day occurs during the tour, there is no refund provided if the circumstances are out of the control of Swimming with Gentle Giants.

Itinerary Disclaimer

The itineraries on our websites and in this PDF are correct at time of publishing and may differ slightly depending on changes to local operations, foreign policy and laws, availability of resources, flight schedules. In the case of any changes, Swimming with Gentle Giants will endeavor to provide an alternative option to continue your itinerary.

Insurance Policy

Travel insurance is NOT included in the cost of your tour. Swimming with Gentle Giants strongly recommends that passengers arrange their own travel insurance. Insurance is required before arriving at your destination to ensure you are covered for unforeseen situations that may arise to cause loss of luggage, cancellation of flights or medical emergencies.

Swimming with Gentle Giants and its affiliates are not responsible for loss or damage of any equipment whilst participating in these activities. Appropriate travel insurance should be arranged prior to visiting your destination.

Release Forms/Waivers

While Swimming with Gentle Giants makes every effort to safeguard our clients, we cannot be held responsible for personal injury or loss due to events beyond our control. Swimming with Gentle Giants carries inherent risk as you are interacting with wild animals and a signed release form is required from all participants before tour departure. This is signed on the first day of departure or prior to arriving at your destination on each separate tour. Guests are encourage to download this liability waiver and return back to Swimming with Gentle Giants prior to your tour.

Foreign Currency

As of October 2023 all tour costs are quoted in \$USD as suppliers and operations in the region move to a more stable currency for services rendered. Tongan Paanga is still the currency used while visiting the islands and will be the only accepted form of currency for tourist in Tonga.

Visas for Tonga

Please review the visa requirements for your country by visiting: <https://www.tongaconsul.com/visa.html>



HAVE SOME QUESTIONS?

Please make sure you have read the **FAQ** in this document. Any other questions don't hesitate to reach out via email.