

# Code of Conduct

## for Operating Tour Boats in the Coastal Environment and Around the Marine Wildlife of Newfoundland & Labrador

**OUR MISSION:** It is our mission to provide passengers with an experience through which they can learn about, respect, care for and enjoy marine wildlife and Newfoundland and Labrador's coastal environment without causing any harm to that environment or its inhabitants. We believe that when our passengers learn about and care for the marine environment, there will be a direct benefit to the creatures that live there. Human activity can sometimes have a negative impact on the environment and the animals we care about. To ensure that does not occur during our tour boat operations, we have agreed to observe the following Code of Conduct.

**OUR MARINE ENVIRONMENT:** Newfoundland and Labrador's cold ocean gains its productivity by the instability of the water column that mixes oxygen rich and nutrient rich waters. Our coastal environment is dominated by the Labrador Current, a river in the ocean of cold Arctic waters that carries icebergs from Greenland. These conditions provide the primary productivity that builds the rich web of marine wildlife on which our Province depends.

**OUR CONDUCT IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT:** Our work environment is the ocean but it is home for the multitude of creatures that live there. In our operation we will strive in every way to minimize our impact on the quality of the environment while maximizing the comfort, enjoyment and satisfaction of our passengers.

- We will always operate our vessel safely in accordance with Department of Transport regulations.
- We will always operate our vessel with courtesy and we will be helpful to other vessels.
- We will operate our vessel in a manner which minimizes the release of any foreign material such as garbage, noise or pollutants
- We will be cautious within the vicinity of any fishing gear.
- When small vessels such as kayaks are present, we will ensure they will not be affected by the wake of our vessel
- We will operate our vessel in a manner which will minimize any harmful impact on the aesthetics of the marine environment.
- We will conduct an accurate and informative interpretation program on the marine environment.
- We will participate in training programs so that our staff has accurate, in-depth and up-to-date information on the marine environment and its inhabitants.
- We will report to the appropriate authorities any misconduct that is deemed to have a negative impact on the marine environment

**OUR CONDUCT AROUND WHALES:** Whales are important and plentiful animals in Newfoundland and Labrador's coastal environment. As it is in the observation of all wildlife behaviour, it is important to allow the whale to control any interaction. If the animal is curious, it will approach our vessel. If it is disturbed by our presence, it will move away. The key to our conduct around whales is to recognize that they are wild animals that must rest, forage, feed, socialize and complete other life processes to survive. Any activity by a vessel that disturbs or prevents animals from completing life processes represents a threat to the conservation and survival of these majestic creatures.

- Prior to whale watching tours, we will encourage realistic expectations of encounters with whales to avoid disappointing our customers and to reduce pressure from them to undertake risky vessel activities.
- We will operate our vessel in a manner that does not disturb whales. Harassment is indicated when the animal changes its behaviour because of our presence or activities. A change in behaviour is observed when whales change their swimming direction or speed, when they cease or increase specific behaviours, or when they leave an area.
- We will not operate our vessel in a manner that changes the behaviour of the whales, causes disruption to their social groups, or makes them leave an area.

To insure our vessel does not disturb the whales we watch:

- When we are within 100m of whales, we will not try to get any closer to them.
- When animals are within 100 m of our vessel we will allow the animals to completely control the interaction and operate our vessel with due caution.
- We will ensure that animals are not surrounded by boats by giving way when more than two boats are within 100 m of whales.
- We will not pursue or chase whales.
- We will not operate our vessel at high speeds when whales are nearby.
- We will not cut across the paths of animals but will approach slowly from the rear, parallel to the animal's path.
- When whales are near our vessel we will reduce our speed and be aware of the noise our vessel makes underwater.
- We will take special care when mothers and calves are present to ensure that we do not separate them.
- When vessel traffic is intense and persistent near animals, we will conduct searches to find other, less disturbed animals.
- We will provide our passengers with accurate, up-to-date information about whales, and inform them of their role in the marine ecosystem. We will urge them to appreciate and support the conservation of the animals and preservation of the marine habitat animals require.
- We will encourage research and cooperate with researchers who examine the impact of tour boats on whales and the marine environment and who contribute to a greater understanding of marine biology.

**OUR CONDUCT AROUND SEABIRD COLONIES:** Seabird colonies on islands are critical habitats for reproduction. Mating, nesting, incubating and foraging to feed newly hatched chicks are natural and essential life processes. Islands have been selected as breeding habitats because they provide freedom from disturbances. Disturbance causes the birds to take flight, vocalize and circle in the area. This leaves eggs and chicks vulnerable to predators.

To ensure our vessel does not disturb nesting seabirds:

- We will operate our vessel at an adequate distance from the shores of colony islands;
- We will minimize any noise that can disturb the birds;
- We will operate our vessel at a speed and in a manner in which birds do not flush from nests.
- We will provide accurate information about the life histories of the birds, the habitat they require and instil care and respect for them.

**OUR CONDUCT NEAR SEABIRDS ON WATER:** Seabirds that are seen on the surface of the ocean around colonies may be resting, foraging, feeding, courting or preening. These are all critical activities that vessel presence can disrupt. If birds are repeatedly forced to fly and are interrupted in their activities, serious biological consequences could develop.

To insure our vessel minimizes disturbances to seabirds on the water:

- We will give birds on the water as wide a berth as is practical.
- We will control the speed, noise and activities of our vessel to minimize the flight responses of the birds.

**OUR CONDUCT NEAR OTHER SEA CREATURES:** Giant basking sharks, the endangered leatherback turtle, harp seals, harbour seals, grey seals, and ocean sunfish are found in our waters. All these animals are busy pursuing a living and vessel presence and behaviour can interfere with their endeavours.

In their presence, we will limit the speed and noise of our vessels. We will also control the proximity of our vessels to the animals so we will not disturb them.

**OUR CONDUCT AROUND ICEBERGS:** Icebergs are prominent features of Newfoundland and Labrador's coastal environment. They are ever changing and beautiful as they drift in currents from Greenland past our shores. However caution should be taken as these massive ice masses can break apart or rollover without notice.

To ensure our vessel and passengers are safe:

- We will give icebergs adequate berth for the safety of our vessel and passengers.


**USE OF THE CODE:** We will provide our passengers with copies of this Code of Conduct, on request, so they understand the constraints on the operation of our vessel.

- We have formulated this Code based on our experience with the animals and the marine environment and in consultation with marine mammal and seabird scientists. We are committed to providing a memorable experience for our passengers without harming the wildlife. Because there are no current guidelines which could evaluate and monitor correct conduct in the marine environment, we will participate fully in assessing the value of this newly created Code as a method of protecting ocean wildlife. We will work to adjust the code in the future to maintain its relevance as a practical method of ensuring a secure habitat for wildlife while continuing to provide a first rate experience for our passengers.

If our passengers have complaints about our behaviour, or perceive a failure to follow this code, they should discuss them with us. They can also contact the Adventure Tourism Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (ATANL) to report and discuss their complaints.

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This Code of Conduct was developed by: the Adventure Tourism Association of Newfoundland & Labrador (ATANL)  Hospitality Newfoundland & Labrador (HNL)

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