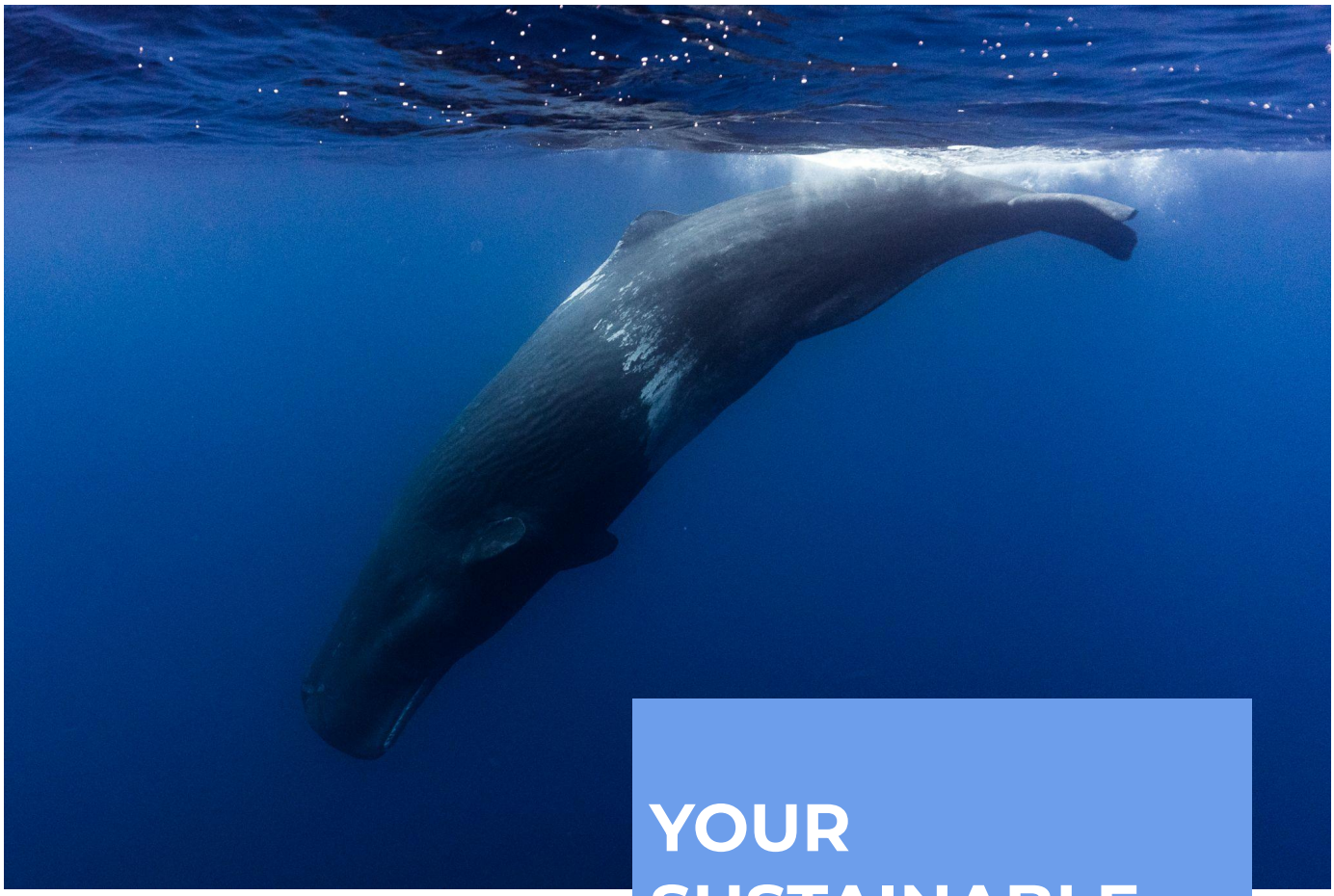

YOUR SUSTAINABLE WHALE WATCHING GUIDE TO THE AZORES - 2024

BY THE OCEAN AZORES FOUNDATION

WRITTEN BY ALI BULLOCK
PRESIDENT, OCEAN AZORES FOUNDATION

Photo taken by Francisco Garcia - Ocean Azores Foundation Ambassador

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LISA STIENER
RUI SOARES
FRANCISCO GARCIA
NUNO SA
JOÃO QUARESMA
DAVID OCHA

We thank these volunteers and ambassadors for their input and help to create this guide.

I would also like to personally thank you for taking the time to read this and for choosing ethical whale watching operators in the Azores committed to the sustainable future of our islands and the cetaceans of the Azores.

ALI BULLOCK
PRESIDENT - THE OCEAN AZORES FOUNDATION

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PRESIDENT, OCEAN AZORES FOUNDATION

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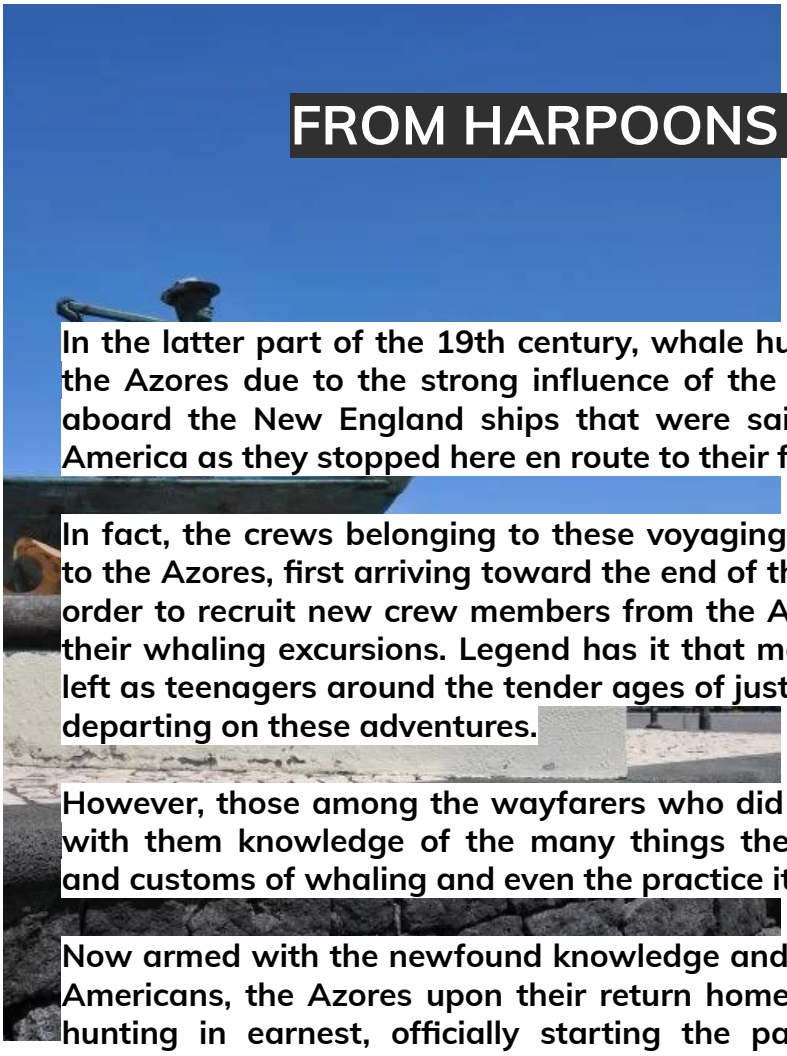
THE OCEAN AZORES PHOTOGRAPHER 2024

THE OCEAN AZORES PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR TELLS THE STORY OF A UNIQUE MARINE SANCTUARY. JOIN US AS WE USE THE POWER OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO ADVANCE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, SPREAD AWARENESS AND WORK ON SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM IN THE AZORES.

THE WINNING PHOTOS ARE DISPLAYED AT SÃO MIGUEL AS YOU ENTER THE ARRIVALS HALL OR ONLINE AT OCEANAZORES.ORG



FROM HARPOONS TO HERITAGE

In the latter part of the 19th century, whale hunting first became popular in the Azores due to the strong influence of the crews arriving at the Islands aboard the New England ships that were sailing to the archipelago from America as they stopped here en route to their final destinations.

In fact, the crews belonging to these voyaging ships actually began coming to the Azores, first arriving toward the end of the 18th century, specifically in order to recruit new crew members from the Azores Islands to join them on their whaling excursions. Legend has it that many of the younger boys who left as teenagers around the tender ages of just 13 or 14 never returned after departing on these adventures.

However, those among the wayfarers who did return to the Azores brought with them knowledge of the many things they learned,including the ways and customs of whaling and even the practice itself.

Now armed with the newfound knowledge and skills they'd learned from the Americans, the Azores upon their return home to the Islands, began whale hunting in earnest, officially starting the pastime in the Azores Islands around 1864.

Whaling in the Azores was officially deemed illegal in the year of 1984. Shortly after this decree was made official in the Azores, the last whaling factory in the Islands was closed and the island archipelago shifted its focus to a much friendlier and sustainable activity, whale watching.

PORTUGAL SIGNED THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION MORATORIUM IN **1982**. THE LAST WHALE WAS KILLED IN **1987**

Source: International Whaling Commission

IN 2023 THE AZORES BECAME A WHALE HERITAGE SITE

FIND OUT MORE AT

OCEANAZORES.ORG

Photo taken by David Ocha & Francisco Garcia - Ocean Azores Foundation Ambassador

FIND OUT MORE:

CETACEANS OF THE AZORES

IN THE AZORES YOU WILL FIND ONE THIRD OF THE WORLD'S WHALE AND DOLPHIN SPECIES, WHICH LIVE IN THESE WATERS OR PASS THROUGH ON SEASONAL MIGRATIONS.

15 SPECIES OF WHALES IN THE AZORES:

1. SPERM WHALE
2. BLUE WHALE
3. FIN WHALE
4. SEI WHALE
5. MINKE WHALE
6. HUMPBACK WHALE
7. BRYDE'S WHALE
8. NORTHERN BOTTLENOSE WHALE
9. DWARF SPERM WHALE
10. PYGMY SPERM WHALE
11. CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALE
12. SOWERBY'S BEAKED WHALE
13. BLAINEVILLE'S BEAKED WHALE
14. GERVAIS BEAKED WHALE
15. TRUE'S BEAKED WHALE

10 SPECIES OF DOLPHINS IN THE AZORES:

1. BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN
2. COMMON DOLPHIN
3. PILOT WHALE
4. RISSOS DOLPHIN
5. ORCA / KILLER WHALE
6. FALSE KILLER WHALE
7. ATLANTIC SPOTTED DOLPHIN
8. STRIPED DOLPHIN
9. ROUGH-TOOTHED DOLPHIN
10. FRASER'S DOLPHIN

5 SPECIES OF CARTILAGINOUS FISHES:

1. BLUE SHARK
2. SHORTFIN MAKO SHARK
3. SMOOTH HAMMERHEAD SHARK
4. WHALE SHARK
5. SICKLEFIN DEVIL RAY

Source: Lisa Steiner - Whale Watch Azores

Source: Insight Guides

Month	Dolphins	BTT Dolphin	Risso's	Sperm Whale	Baleen	Orcas	Blue Whales
January	High	Low	Low	Medium	Rare	High	Rare
February	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	High	Rare
March	High	High	Low	Medium	High	High	Rare
April	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	High
May	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High
June	High	High	Medium	High	Medium	Rare	Rare
July	High	High	High	High	Medium	Rare	Rare
August	High	High	High	High	Medium	Rare	Rare
September	High	High	High	High	Medium	Rare	Rare
October	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Rare	Rare
November	High	Low	Low	Medium	Rare	Rare	Rare
December	High	Low	Low	Medium	Rare	Medium	Rare

AVERAGE WHALE SIGHTINGS BY MONTH ON SÃO MIGUEL

Photo taken by Nuno Sa - Ocean Azores Foundation Ambassador

RECOMMENDED COMPANIES:

SÁO MIGUEL:
TERRA AZUL *
TERRA DA PICO
PICOS DA ADVENTURA *

BEST SPOT
SEASON CHALLENGE

FAIAL:
AZORES EXPERIENCES
NORBERTO DIVER
PETER'S CAFE

PICO:
ESPACO TALASSA

**** OFFERS SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS WHICH WE DO NOT SUPPORT***

Photo taken by Francisco Garcia - Ocean Azores Foundation Ambassador

WHALE WATCHING: THE RULES

Fundamental rules:

- Do not exceed the speed of the animals by more than 2 knots, keeping the speed steady

- The boats should move parallel to each other, positioning themselves on a 60º angle, behind the animals

- Avoid direction and heading changes

- Maintain a parallel course, slightly behind de animals, so they may keep a 180º angle free ahead of them

- Avoid noises in the proximity of the animals that may disturb or attract them

- Whenever the animals show signs of disturbance, the boats should move beyond the observation area, behind the animals

- ABSOLUTELY NO swimming with the whales (without a government approved licence)

- Drone footage is FORBIDDEN (without a government approved licence)

Whale watching companies must NOT:

- Get closer than 50 metres from any cetacean and should remain farther than 500 metres from an animal or group of animals that are motionless, resting or in labor.

- Provoke the separation of the group of animals, mainly the calves

- Approach whale calves when alone on the surface, as well as to approach whales with small calves, less than 100 metres

- Have more than 3 boats, in a 300 metres radius in the presence of dolphins, and 500 metres in the presence of whales.

- Remain in the observation area beyond 30 minutes

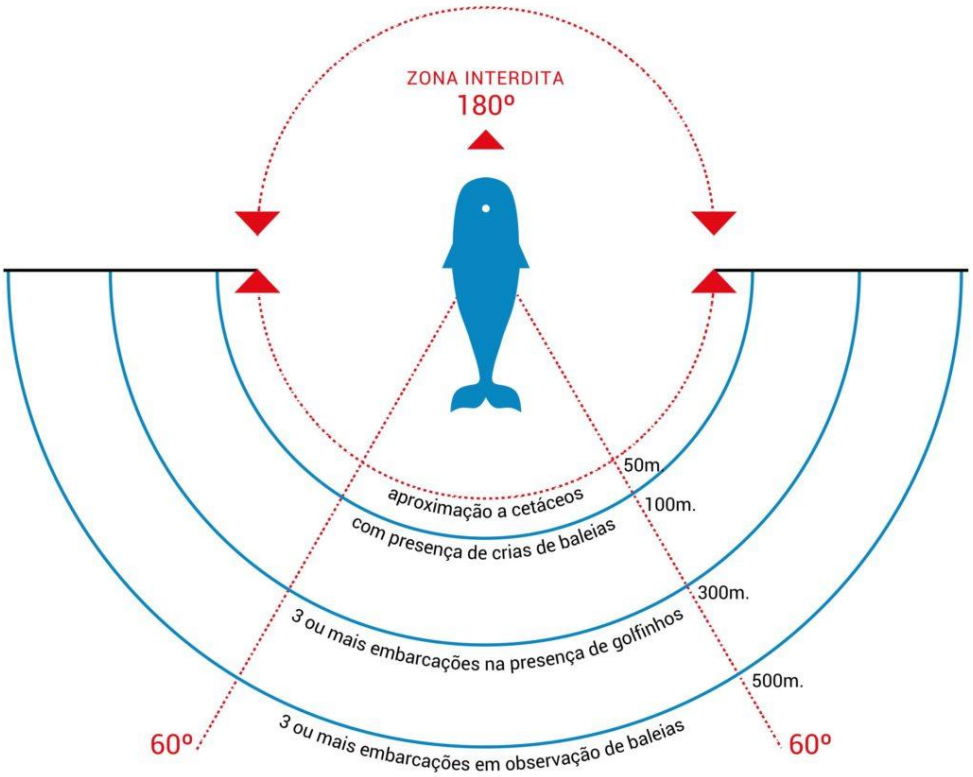
- Use of sonar, including the area outside the observation zone.

- Use of underwater motorised vehicles, in the area close to the animals

- Chase the animals or feed the animals

- Pollute the ocean with solid or liquid residues

WHALE WATCHING: THE RULES



Reputable whale watching companies will be more than happy to outline their processes and the laws regulating whale watching.

By asking questions you can help ensure that all companies adhere to the rules of whale watching.

Any doubts, questions or feedback please email: ali@solarbranco.com

SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS: IS IT AN ETHICAL EXPERIENCE?

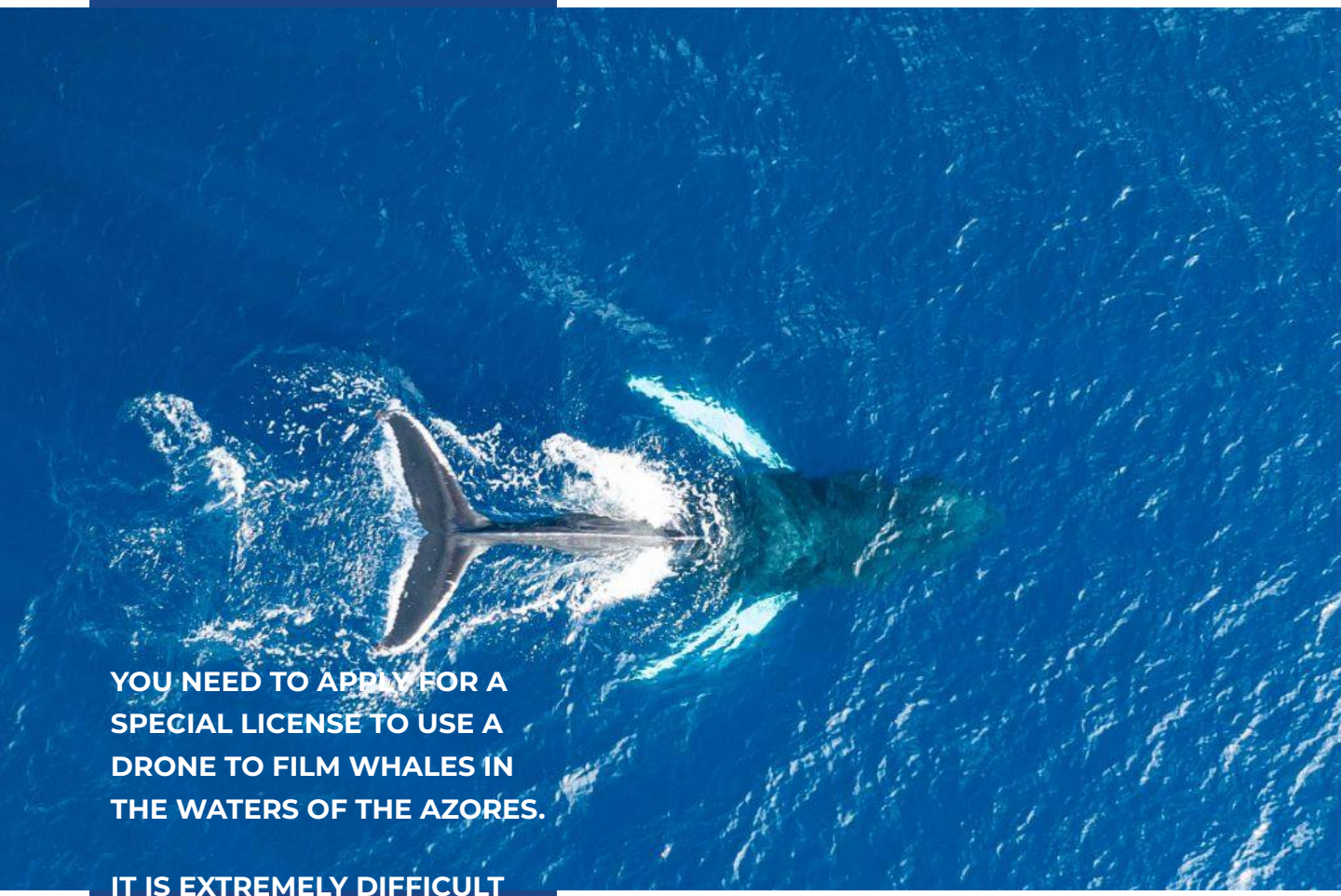
SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS IS ALLOWED IN THE AZORES WITH REGISTERED WHALE WATCHING PROVIDERS.

THERE ARE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER AS TO WHETHER THIS IS AN ETHICAL EXPERIENCE OR NOT. MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED INTO THE IMPACT THAT IS HAS ON DOLPHINS, ESPECIALLY ON THE YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE POD.

IF YOU DO GO SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS: ASK AND ENSURE THAT YOUR OPERATOR IS NOT PUTTING YOU IN THE WATER WITH A NURSERY GROUP. THIS CAN CAUSE BOTH THE MOTHERS AND CALVES STRESS AND CAN LEAD TO LESS SUCKLING AND RESTING TIMES. ULTIMATELY THIS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO KILL THE CALF.

Photo taken by Francisco Garcia - Ocean Azores Foundation Ambassador

DRONE FILMING OF WHALES IS ILLEGAL



YOU NEED TO APPLY FOR A SPECIAL LICENSE TO USE A DRONE TO FILM WHALES IN THE WATERS OF THE AZORES.

IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO GAIN APPROVAL UNLESS IT IS FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT. ALL LICENSES ARE APPROVED THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE AZORES.

IF YOU SEE A BOAT OR ANYONE FILMING WITH A DRONE. TAKE A PHOTO AND REPORT IT!

Drone photo taken under license from the Azorean Govt by Areal World Visions

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WRITTEN BY THE OCEAN AZORES FOUNDATION

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