

Humpback Whale Regulations in Tonga: Interactions With Yachts

Humpback whales migrate to Tonga every year to mate and give birth in our sheltered water ways. In order to protect the whales, and to make sure that they are not disturbed by our activities, on and in the water, the Government of Tonga has passed the Whale Watch and Swim Regulations (2013). To help you and your crew make the most of your time here in Tonga during the exciting months of the humpback whale season, the Tonga Whale Watchers Association has put together the following information which relates to non-licensed vessels in Tongan waters.

Taken from articles 9, 10 and 11 of the regulations:

1. Unless you are in a licensed whale watching or whale swimming vessel, you are not allowed to approach any whale closer than 300m
2. Swimming with whales is prohibited unless you are on a licensed vessel and in the water with a certified guide.
3. If a whale surfaces near you, you should change the course of your vessel, in a safe manner, and move 300m away from the whales at no-wake speed.
4. Kayaking with humpback whales is prohibited unless the kayak is launched from a licensed vessel.
5. No jet skis are allowed within 2km of any whale.

The penalties for any individual breaking these laws are as follows:

First time offence: A fine of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 and/or imprisonment up to 18 months

Repeat offence: A fine between \$1,000 and \$10,000 and/or imprisonment up to 3 years.

If you have any questions while you are out on the water or when you are back in town, please feel free to hail any of the operators and they will be happy to help. Alternatively, you can go along to the Tonga Visitors Bureau and they can also answer any questions you may have.

These laws are vital to protect our whales and to ensure that the important business of breeding, birthing and feeding their young can take place year after year.

Thank you for your cooperation and welcome to Vava'u!

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