



Frequently Asked Questions



Contact Us:

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spawn time, whale sharks are frequently sighted. Other large pelagics include manta rays, eagle rays, southern and rough-tail stingrays, and occasionally spotted dolphins.

Boats

How big?

100ft aluminum crew boats refit for diving in the Gulf. The boats have tank racks for each diver, large camera tables and camera rinse barrels, 2 boarding ladders with large swim platforms, and large sundecks.

How fast?

Both boats are powered by three 12V71 Detroit Diesel engines and run at a top speed of approximately 17 knots. They each have two 30kw generators to keep the lights on and the air compressors pumping.

How many divers?

Each boat carries 31 passengers, 3 trip leaders, and 6 boat crew, for a total of 40 people.

Can non-divers go?

Non-divers are welcome to come along. If the boat is NOT full, they may come at half price. If the boat is FULL or there is a diver that wants the spot any time prior to departure, they must pay full price or release the spot.

Who are the crew?

The boat's crew consists of 2 Coast Guard licensed captains, 2 galley hands and 2 divemasters. The captains are paid, the rest of the crew work for tips and diving.

How are the bunks?

Each boat has 32 passenger bunks—30 singles and 2 doubles. The bunks each have their own privacy curtain, are grouped in cabins of 4 or 6. The Fling's cabins have doors. Bunks cannot be reserved. We provide sheets, blankets and pillows. DON'T FORGET YOUR TOWEL!

Is there a TV?

Both boats have a television with VCR/DVD and stereo. They have a selection of movies available, but you are more than welcome to bring your own. The crew would love to see something new! We also have cables for some video systems so you can play the tape from your last dive for all to see.

Don't forget your log book and C-card!

Flower Gardens

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary web site
www.flowergarden.nos.noaa.gov

How far is it?

110 miles south of the Texas/Louisiana border in approximately 350 ft of water.

How deep is the reef?

The reef caps are about 60 feet from the surface on all three banks. That's the very top, with the banks dropping off well past the reach of recreational divers.

What does it look like?

The West and East Banks of the Flower Gardens coral banks covered with 21 different species of coral—mostly hard corals, no fans or whips. Stetson is a clay bank with approximately 40% sponge cover and very few places for the fish to hide!

What will I see?

Over 200 species of fish, 250 species of invertebrates and 21 species of coral inhabit the Flower Gardens. Loggerhead turtles are year-round residents. In February and March, hammerhead sharks school on the banks, with the occasional spinner shark and tiger shark. In late summer around coral

Boarding

Take your seasickness precautions early!

When should we get there?

The boats board promptly at 8:30 pm the evening prior to the trip date, so you should arrive around 8:00 pm to unload your gear and get ready to board. We usually return to the dock between 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm on the last trip day.

Are bunks assigned?

No. Bunks are on a first-come, first-served basis at boarding time. Only the 2 double bunks take preference, and the divemasters will find out who would like them just before boarding.

Where do we park?

After you have unloaded your gear next to the dock, you will move your car to the other side of the levee in a large grass parking lot.

Diving

Certification and age?

Divers must hold a minimum certification of open water or junior open water and be at least 12 years old. Minor children coming without a parent or legal guardian upon boarding must provide the crew with an originally signed and notarized Gulf Diving release and authorization for medical treatment with photocopies of the parent's medical insurance. These forms are available on our website. Please note, each individual sheet of paper must be signed and notarized. Minors without completed release forms and medical treatment consent forms will not be taken offshore.

What is DAN Insurance?

We highly recommend purchasing diving accident insurance. Divers Alert Network offers very reasonably priced plans for DAN members. Many training organizations also offer accident insurance. If you believe you are covered by your primary medical insurance carrier, please read the fine print. Many consider diving to be an "extreme sport" and do not cover treatment for diving injuries or fees incurred during evacuations.

How many dives?

2-day trip—potentially 7 dives. 3-day trip—potentially 11 dives.

Dive schedule?

Typical 2-day trip: 2 morning dives on the West Bank of the Flower Gardens. At lunch move to the East Bank and make 2 more day dives and 1 night dive. Move to Stetson Bank during the night and make 2 morning dives on Stetson before getting underway for Freeport. The near-shore rigs are all being removed, so the near-shore rig dive has been deleted from the schedule. Minimum of 2 ½ hour surface interval between dives.

How are the dives conducted?

The boat divemasters will give a thorough briefing the night you board the boat, and tell you all about the in's and out's of diving off a large boat in the Gulf of Mexico. Site-specific briefings are conducted at each new dive site. The dive times are set by the boat crew, and will be **approximately** 7:00 am, 10:30 am, 2:00 pm, 5:30 pm and 9:00 pm on a 5-dive day. 4-dive days usually start at 8:00 am. 2 ½ hour surface intervals are mandatory, giving you plenty of time for meals, naps and sunbathing. Boat crew does not dive with the passengers, but instead is on deck during all dives to assist with entries and exits, as well as any surface assistance that is needed in-water. The trip leaders will be diving with the passengers. Divers are required to dive with a buddy.

Dive profiles?

The boat-imposed depth limit is 130 fsw **for the first dive of the day ONLY**, and 100 fsw for all subsequent dives. Dives must be planned within recreational limits—no planned-decompression dives are allowed. Within those parameters, buddy teams plan and execute their own dives. Dive times are set by the boat crew. Bottom times are limited only by your no-decompression limits, air consumption and common sense.

Entries and exits?

Entries are giant-stride off the port (sometimes starboard) side of the boat. It's about a 5 foot drop that looks a lot higher for you tall guys, but you'll be wet before you know it. Both boats have 2 ladders secured to the swim platform on the stern for your exit. Exits are made using lines from the ladders to remove your fins, then climbing the ladder with the rest of your gear in place. Camera lines are rigged for lowering and retrieving camera equipment.

Can I spearfish?

No spearfishing is allowed—possession of spearguns is not allowed within the Sanctuary boundaries. The dives are conducted within a marine sanctuary, so no collecting of any kind—live or dead—is allowed.

Can I go snorkeling?

You are welcome to go snorkeling during surface intervals, but please no free-diving. No snorkeling while we're underway, please.

Diving Rules

Depth limits:

The depth limits are 130 fsw for the first dive of the day only, with a maximum allowable depth of 100 fsw for each subsequent dive. Anyone violating the depth limits will be subject to an extended surface interval of 5 hours for the first violation, and a 24 hour extended surface interval for a subsequent violation. A third depth limit violation shows us that the diver's diving skills may not be suitable for diving at the Flower Gardens, and they will sit out the rest of the trip.



Computer/Dive Table violations:

We take a dim view of violating decompression status on computer or dive tables. Any diver found in decompression violation of either their computer or dive tables will need to follow the omitted decompression steps of their computer or tables. This usually involves a 12 or 24 hour extended surface interval. The only exceptions are: (1) in the case of a diver wearing 2 computers, the more conservative one is in DECO, or (2) the obvious failure of a computer, in which case the diver must switch to tables for the remainder of the trip. Failure to turn on a computer prior to entering the water or failure to correctly set the breathing gas is not considered failure of the computer. In this case, the diver will be required to switch to dive tables for the remainder of the dive day. The boat divemasters are required to visually inspect each diver's computer at the time the diver returns to the boat and obtain the diver's profile for the dive.

Out of air:

We feel that running out of air is a failure completely within the control of the diver. Barring equipment failure, any diver in an out of air situation will be barred from diving for the rest of the trip. Out of air is defined as the diver not being able to take an effective breath on their regulator while standing on the dive platform.

Buddy diving:

Every diver must dive with a buddy, maintaining contact throughout the dive. They must enter the water together and return to the boat together with similar dive profiles. Buddy separation is not cause for sitting the divers out, but for a review of the proper attention to safe diving practices. Solo diving is not allowed.



Dive Gear

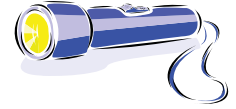
Don't forget your log book and C-card!

What do I need?

All divers should arrive at the boat with a complete set of scuba gear, including but not limited to: mask, snorkel, fins, buoyancy compensator with inflator, regulator with octopus and gauges or dive computer, timing device, weight belt and weights, tank, and appropriate thermal protection. **Dive computers are HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

Rental gear?

There is no rental gear or repair facility on board the boats. Divers need to bring everything with them they need to dive. Also bring your save-a-dive kits!



Air Tanks?

Each diver should bring one **full** cylinder. Both boats have one adapter to fill high-pressure DIN valves, but will only fill to 3000 psi—the boats do not provide high-pressure fills. If you are bringing a cylinder larger or smaller in circumference than an aluminum 80, please bring a bungee cord to secure it—our tank racks are made for 7 ¼" tanks. Doubles are not allowed. We have rental tanks available for divers traveling from out of town. Please let your dive shop know your air tank needs.

Nitrox Tanks?

Nitrox prices remain the same as last year and include tank rental. Personal nitrox tanks will be allowed, with the following requirements: the tank must be properly labeled, pointed out to and flagged by boat crew, filled with 32% EANx, and analyzed in front of a boat divemaster or Captain before getting underway. **Only 32% EANx is allowed.** There is no discount on the nitrox price for using a personal tank. Tanks larger in size than 100 cf will be charged double. Doubles are not allowed. Please let your dive shop know your nitrox tank needs.

Pony Bottles?

Pony bottles in use aboard the M/V Fling are considered redundant safety equipment for emergency situations only. Pony bottles equipped as a redundant gas supply with first and second stage regulators will be filled once at the beginning of the charter if needed. Nitrox fills for pony bottles are \$10. Pony bottle use constitutes an out-of-air situation. A diver equipped with a pony bottle, using the pony bottle gas during a dive, places the diver in the out-of-air restriction and the diver will not be allowed back in the water. As stated in the out-of-air policy, loss of breathing gas from catastrophic equipment failure does not preclude the diver from reentering the water once the equipment failure is remedied. Pony bottles equipped as gas supply for drysuit inflation, having only a first stage regulator, inflator hose and pressure gauge, will be filled with air on an as-needed basis.

Weights?

Divers need to provide their own weight and weight belt. If coming from out of town, the boat is able to provide lead but needs to know approximately how much is needed in advance. There is always some lead on board for anyone who is a few pounds light.

Rebreathers?

Rebreather use is not allowed on the Fling.

Scooters/DPV's?

Diver propulsion vehicles are not allowed on the Fling.

Anything special?

Dive computers are highly recommended—all dives are deep and it's a lot of diving in a short amount of time. Computers help to maximize your bottom time. Surface signaling devices (See-me, safety sausage) and whistles or Dive-Alert's are also highly recommended. It's a big ocean. Gloves are allowed and many divers like to have them for handling the down-lines. Bring your lights (primary, back-up and tank marker) for night diving.



Personal Gear



Luggage?

Dive gear is stored on the dive deck below the benches. Clothes and dry things are stored below your bunks in the berthing area, so it's best to pack in two separate bags. Soft sided luggage and gear bags are preferable to hard cases, as space is limited.

Stuff to buy?

We have t-shirts, sweats, caps and koozies. Major credit cards are accepted for all purchases on board, as well as personal checks and good old cash.

Anything special?

Remember your towels! Bathing suits, shorts and t-shirts are the usual attire. Some people like to have sweats or a light jacket because we keep the boats pretty cool inside. Make sure you bring sunscreen, seasickness preventive, and any over-the-counter or prescription medications you will need during the trip.

Diving with diabetes?

Any diver diagnosed with diabetes, insulin dependent or not, must, upon boarding, provide the crew with an originally signed and dated letter from their doctor on the doctor's letterhead stating that the doctor understands the consequences of diving with diabetes and that the diver is medically fit to dive. Standard medical release forms alone will not be accepted.

Diving with asthma?

Any diver diagnosed with asthma must, upon boarding, provide the crew with an originally signed and dated letter from their doctor on the doctor's letterhead stating that the doctor understands the consequences of diving with asthma and that the diver is medically fit to dive. Standard medical release forms alone will not be accepted.

Food

How's the food?

Plentiful and hot. You won't go hungry.

Drinks?

Lemonade, Gatorade, water, coffee and hot chocolate are available all day. The boats have sodas and beer for sale. The bar closes at midnight. Yes, your first beer of the day marks the end of your diving for that day.

Meals?

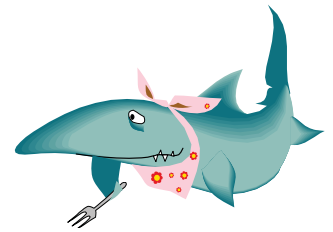
Served buffet-style throughout the day starting with a continental breakfast of rolls, fruit and coffee at 6:00am before the morning dive. After the first dive, a hot breakfast of eggs, bacon or sausage, biscuits and gravy, pancakes or breakfast tacos is served. Lunch is after the second dive and is usually sandwiches, soup, pasta salad or similar fare. Afternoon snack is after the third dive and based upon the creativity of your galley crew—dinner is after dive four and the first night will almost always be Texas brisket, smoked sausage, potatoes, ranch beans, garden salad and desert. Other potentials are spaghetti and meatballs, chicken tenders, fajitas, chicken pot pie, or meatloaf. After your night dive, a snack of warm brownies and vanilla ice cream will be waiting for you.

Special diets?

Our galley hands are more than willing to accommodate restricted diets as long as they know in advance. Vegetarians that eat dairy products are easily accommodated. Low salt or no sugar are also easily arranged. Anyone on a very strict diet, like vegan or kosher, needs to call our office and make special arrangements. PLEASE DO NOT BRING ANYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE REFRIGERATED. The boats do not have room to store items that must be refrigerated or frozen—the coolers are already filled to the brim.

Can I bring snacks?

Meals and snacks are provided from 6:00 am until midnight. For sanitary reasons, no food or drink is allowed below decks. NO EXCEPTIONS. Please do not bring food or drinks to the boat; if you can't make it 2 days without your Milky Way bars, turn them into the galley hands as you board the boat and they will keep them safe for you. Personal ice chests, sodas, beer, and glass containers are not allowed on board at all. Again, **please** do not bring anything that needs to be refrigerated.



Tips

How do the tips work?

Tips are voluntary and performance based. We recommend a 10% gratuity. The Captain will have a basket for tips when tabs are settled at the end of your trip.

Who gets the tips?

The tips are shared equally between the boat's divemasters and galley crew. Sea Sports Divemasters do not participate in the boat tips. If you feel they have earned your thanks, you should tip them directly.