



# Diving with Oceanic Whitetips

## Safe Diving Practices & Guidelines

Oceanic Whitetips are among the few shark species, that will closely approach divers under water. All divers need to be prepared for these potentially close encounters with detailed briefings and information, including the behavioural guidelines they need to follow to keep these encounters safe & enjoyable.

Make sure the divers...

- ... respect the sharks for what they are: self-confident & inquisitive wild predators!
- ... avoid anything that makes them look like prey!

General shark diving rules apply:

- Do not chase after or harass sharks in any way.
- Keep noise & activity levels to a minimum.
- Do not touch sharks.

Specific underwater behavioural rules for interactions with oceanics:

### 1. Stay calm

- Avoid quick and erratic movements with arms and fins, keep your hands tucked in closely.
- When approached closely, slowly take a vertical position in the water column.

### 2. Keep your eyes on the shark(s)

- Stay alert, look around and pay attention to other divers to avoid being surprised by an approaching shark.
- Follow the movement of the shark by pivoting in your vertical position with minimal movement.
- If you notice a change in shark behaviour (getting 'excited' or 'agitated'), keep your distance or leave the area/water in a calm and orderly fashion.
- Do NOT turn around and swim away from a shark.
- If you need to leave the water with oceanics close by, fin backwards towards the boat/reef with slow, deliberate movements while watching the shark(s).

### 3. Control your buoyancy

- Quick, uncontrolled changes in depth (both up & down) can spark a shark's curiosity and may cause it to follow.
- Stay in a minimum depth of 5 meters to avoid potentially dangerous situations near or on the surface (including zodiac traffic).

### 4. Limit your time on the surface

- Do not swim or snorkel in areas with possible oceanic whitetip sightings.
- Check for oceanics close to or underneath you, before jumping off the back of your boat or rolling off a zodiac.
- When jumping off the back of the boat, descend as quickly - and safely - as possible to a depth of at least 5 metres.
- In case a surface line has to be used, divers should calmly pull themselves along with their hands only, stay alert, and stop to turn and face sharks that approach.

- For a zodiac pickup (especially away from the reef), reduce the number of divers on the surface at the same time; send them up singly or in pairs.
- If necessary, tell guests to leave their dive kit floating on the surface (after making sure they inflated their BCDs!!!), get themselves in the zodiac, and collect the kit after.
- Do not allow divers to be pulled back to the boat behind a zodiac.

#### 5. Close approaches

- Oceanic whitetips are more likely to closely approach single or isolated divers, not groups of divers.
- They rarely come close to the reef, most approaches occur shallow, underneath mooring boats or in the blue.
- At close range (within ~ 30 cm) push a waterwave towards an approaching shark (ideally towards the gill area) to make it turn away.
- To prevent a shark from touching you, calmly get your fin, a camera, or any other object (e.g. a shark stick) in place as a buffer.
- As a last resort, guide or gently push a shark away from you with your hand(s).
- Do not act overly aggressive towards a shark; it might trigger a defensive reaction.

There is a fine line between scaring people, and making sure they know what to expect and how to react...

Do not claim, that diving with sharks is risk-free! Because it isn't... but the risk of diving with sharks, including oceanic whitetips, is minimal.

Sharks in general are not dangerous to people. But we still need to make sure, that our presence and behaviour do not create dangerous situations.