

Manatee Tours

Crystal River, Florida, is perhaps best known as a tourism destination because of its unique opportunities to interact with the Florida Manatee. Large, docile marine mammals, the manatees are truly a unique species. They are in theory, protected by various state and federal laws. Both the USFWS (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) and FWCC (Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission) issue guidelines for interacting with manatees which, despite being posted on numerous manatee tour websites, are widely ignored by both the operators and participants of those tours.

All our manatee tours are conducted from kayaks and in strict accordance with the true principles of ecotourism. That means small groups and a no touch policy. We believe that ecotourism has to be an ethic, not just a marketing tool.

It is a common argument that swim with the manatee programs don't kill manatees, therefore there is nothing wrong with swimming with them. While at Aardvark's, we agree that swimming with the manatees does not in and of itself legally constitute harassment as it is currently being defined, , there is no data to support the contention that it is not harmful to the animals at a sub-lethal level.

The constant need for swimmers to touch the animals is what concerns us the most. It generates stress in the animals, and leads to clear cut harassment. This is what we object to. What we commonly witness goes well beyond the passive interaction that is suppose to be the norm.

Another argument is that manatee like to be petted. Maybe so, but that doesn't mean it is in their best interest. Wild animals that acclimate to humans are usually put in harms way. Most folks (though not all) seem to have come to grips with the fact that feeding manatees is bad. It shouldn't be such a stretch to understand that petting, just like feeding is a stimulus that causes an unnatural attraction.

Does proper interaction occur? Most certainly, but it is no longer the rule, rather the exception. Even some of the better shops, float ropes off their pontoons to attract manatees. The educational value of these encounters no longer outweighs the potential harm. While we encourage people to enjoy and appreciate the manatee as wild animal, we ask that your understand that they are not here to entertain us, rather they are here to survive.

Cost is \$40 pp For a Public Tour and \$60 pp for a Private Tour Reservations Required Groups Rates available. 6% Sales Tax applies. Seasonal October - April



Call 352-795-5650 for Reservations