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KATE WEBSTER
DIVES INTO
TONGA'S
WATERS OFF
HA'APAI TO
SWIM WITH
THE MAJESTIC
HUMPBACK
WHALES.

GRANT THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY



TONGA'S MAJESTIC HUMPBACK WHALES

There are few wildlife encounters that allow you to get so up close and personal, while maintaining a respect for the animal and its environment. In Tonga, they have found a way to peacefully interact with the whales with minimum impact.

MINIMAL IMPACT

Each year from mid-July to mid-October, Tonga's serene islands become the resting place for the majestic humpback whales. North of Tonga's main island of Tongatapu are the islands of Ha'apai. Here is a safe haven for the migrating humpback whales from Antarctic. These calm warm waters of Ha'apai offer refuge for the whales to breed, birth and socialise before making the arduous journey back south.

Tonga is one of only a few countries in the world where you can swim with humpback whales. The experience is carefully managed with sensible tourism guidelines and experienced guides to ensure minimal impact on the whales and their environment.

Majestic Whale Encounters is a family run company whose sole purpose is to take guests on an experience of a lifetime that few people have the chance to do. They take care of you from the moment you're picked up at Nuku'alofa airport till the time you sadly depart from the beautiful islands.

Their tours go beyond frolicking with whales in the tropical turquoise waters, with activities such as relaxing on the beautiful white sandy beaches, snorkelling the coral reefs, reading your favourite book in a hammock, sipping cocktails as the sun goes down.

LUXURY ACCOMMODATION

Majestic Whale Encounters tours stay at properties such as Seachange Eco Retreat, on Uoleva Island, part of the Ha'apai Island group, who provide unique luxury beach front accommodation with the lightest possible footprint.

Depending on the weather, mornings at Seachange begin with a healthy breakfast before heading out in search of whales. Joined by experienced and knowledgeable guides, swimmers are briefed about the importance of respecting the whales in their space to ensure a safe interaction for whales and swimmers.

EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE

Finding the whales and watching them from the surface is exhilarating. They are everywhere in these waters, but there is a lot of water for them to hide in. Adult humpbacks surface every 20 minutes, expelling the spent air through their blowholes before gulping down fresh oxygen. Known as a 'blow', you can spot fine mist that rises above the waves some 3km away.

The boat races towards a sighting then waits for the whales to surface again. The vast array of interesting behaviours from the whales include a graceful spy hop, powerful fin or fluke slaps to continual full body breaching and inquisitive approaches to the boat. Add to this the use of a hydrophone (waterproof microphone) to listen to the magical whale love songs and the experience above the water is incredible.

LIFE CHANGING

When you dive into the bluest clear waters the experience is emphasized beyond belief. Some could even call it life-changing, as you snorkel towards a resting mother humpback whale while her calf playfully swims nearby.

Trying to keep the legal distance from the whales can be challenging, with the young whales often keen to come up and investigate the swimmers. As these beautiful creature glide past you it is hard to contain the rush of emotions. ❖

Pocket Guide



If you want to experience Tonga's humpback whales, Where Wild Things Roam Travel have special departures in 2019. Visit www.wherewildthingsroamtravel.com or email hello@wherewildthingsroam.com.

Fly to Tonga with Fiji Airways via Nadi to Nuku'alofa (Tonga).