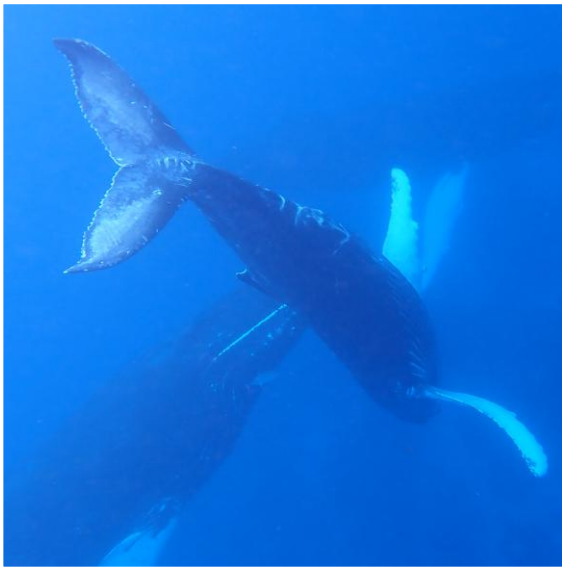
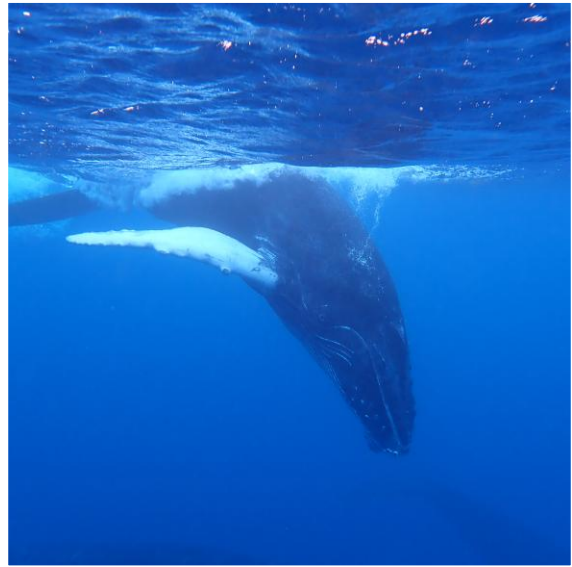


Tour Report Snorkelling with Humpbacks on Silver Bank 5 – 15 February 2026

Humpback whale



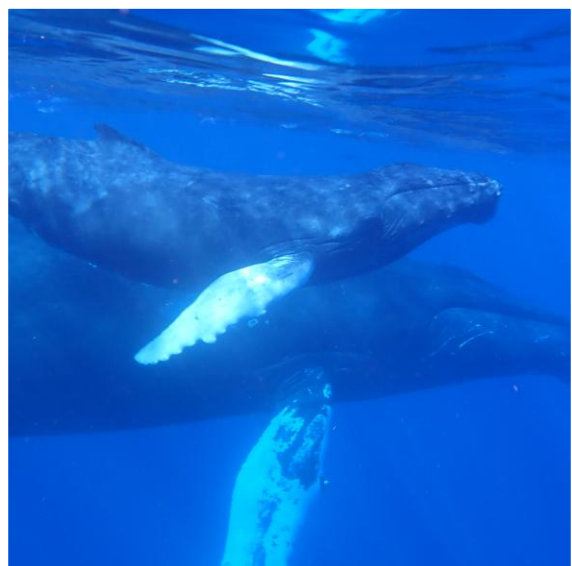
Humpback whale



Humpback whale



Humpback whale



Compiled by Helen Bryon

Take whale watching to the next level on this superb sea safari in the Dominican Republic, one of a handful of destinations worldwide that offers the opportunity to snorkel with humpback whales. From the comfort of our privately chartered vessel, we spend a week on Silver Bank and up to eight hours per day out on the water in tenders and in wetsuits, searching for 'co-operative whales' who may wish to share their silent sanctuary with us beneath the waves. Slipping into the depths as quietly as possible, we grab every second that we can in their company, culminating in memorable moments that are calming, peaceful, awe-inspiring and humbling in equal measure. Quite possibly, this is one of the most incredible wildlife experiences on the planet.

We had days where we simply watched them, a variety of behaviours evident in this marine sanctuary that was set up in 1986 to protect their mating and calving grounds. An estimated 5-7,000 individuals pass through the Silver Bank's waters during the first few months of the year, and we time our visit to take full advantage of this. Males breach to impress females, 'rowdy groups' are followed in an endurance race that results in the strongest genes being passed on, body language clearly warns off unwelcome attention as new mothers protect their calves from over-eager males, and youngsters delight as they prove to be inquisitive, coming ever closer until they may be literally a metre or two away.

Should the dates of our group charter not work for you, we are pleased to be able to offer this holiday on a tailor-made basis, securing space for you on two out of only three vessels permitted to operate here. You don't have to be a strong swimmer to join us, but you do need to be confident and comfortable in deep water. It is, of course, completely acceptable to simply watch proceedings from the tenders should you prefer, but if you take the plunge and are rewarded with close encounters of the giant kind, my word, you will not regret it!

Thursday 5 February 2026

Day 1:

London Heathrow to Miami

The group met up with Tour Leader, Helen, at Heathrow and departed on schedule for their nonstop flight to Miami with American Airlines. Arriving midafternoon local time, we were through Immigration just 25 minutes after landing and a little later, with all baggage collected, made our way outside the terminal to the well-signposted, designated pick up point for complimentary hotel shuttles. By 17:00 we were checking in at The Pullman Miami Airport, our home for one night, where the atmosphere was certainly festive! The lounge and bar area was heaving with partygoers in town on a cruise celebrating the forthcoming Super Bowl. With the philosophy that "If we can't beat them, join them", we met up for an early dinner at 18:30. Despite the noise and overrun bar staff, we enjoyed our burgers, quesadillas, tacos, and fish and chip dinners when they finally arrived in takeaway Styrofoam containers. An early night followed as we prepared for the next leg of our journey tomorrow.

Friday 6 February 2026

Day 2:

Miami to Puerto Plata

Weather: sunny and 18°C at origin, rain and 26°C at destination

The impressive hotel buffet breakfast was well received and we made our way back to Miami airport for our onward flight to Puerto Plata with plenty of time to spare. We made use of the self-service bag-tag machines, dropped off our checked luggage and were airside quickly and efficiently. Our 90-minute flight departed on time, affording us magnificent views of the Bahamas and Turks & Caicos Islands as we flew south-east, idyllic sand bars lapped by turquoise seas far below. We descended into thick cloud over the Dominican Republic, landing in the rain and a wonderful musical number from an enthusiastic quartet wearing Hawaiian (Caribbean?!) style shirts who generated wide smiles upon entering the airport terminal.

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Regardless of the weather, we received a warm reception from Tony, our transfer operator waiting for us in Arrivals. We were split across three vehicles for our 20-minute drive and were at our all-inclusive, adult-only resort within an hour of touchdown. A little downtime ensued to settle in and after a drink in the bar, we met up for dinner in the buffet restaurant at 19:00. We couldn't all be accommodated together, so we split into smaller groups, a nice way to get to know each other, and a nightcap preceded bed.

Saturday 7 February 2026

Day 3:

Morning at leisure followed by afternoon embarkation

Weather: cloudy and wet, 26°C

We had the majority of the day to ourselves before our 16:00 transfer to Ocean World Marina. Our rooms had handily been booked for two nights, enabling everyone to stay in them until our time of departure. There was music around the pool so most of the group relocated to the beach and enjoyed long leisurely walks or relaxed on one of the many loungers out there. One braved a swim and although there were patches of blue sky appearing intermittently, it was largely overcast with a little 'mizzle'.

We were picked up promptly late afternoon and drove in spitting rain west to the marina. Once at our destination, we were met by TJ, one of 10 crew members, who pointed out our streamlined and rather handsome (if that is the right word) vessel, Turks & Caicos Explorer II in her mooring. Once our main luggage had been gathered together and transported by golf cart directly to our cabins, we followed on foot at 17:00. Embarking at the stern, we were excited to explore our home for the next seven nights. Initial impressions were great as we made ourselves comfortable in the large lounge/dining area complete with picture windows, and were asked to tuck into an inviting cheese board with crackers, olives and antipasti (ooh, that brie)! We did as we were told, helping ourselves to drinks from the bar or the tea and coffee station too. We were quick to learn that for the next week rarely would an hour go by without us being offered something for sustenance. We certainly weren't going to waste away!

Then, we handed in our passports for the duration, and cabin by cabin, were taken by a crew member to our good-sized en suite accommodation, complete with ample storage space, US charging points, bed linen, towels, blankets, shower gel, shampoo, conditioner and hand soap. After a ship orientation too, we had time to unpack before gathering to meet the Captain, Jean-Francois at 18:00. He introduced his crew, outlined life on board, and went through safety drills before we gathered at the muster station and were shown how to securely fit and wear our life jackets. Dinner was served at 19:00, the seared salmon with carrot mash, asparagus spears, salad and couscous certainly went down well, enhanced by ice cream and strawberries afterwards.

We had a surprise 'pop in' from Wildlife Worldwide founder, Chris Breen, and his wife Nicky, also travelling here but on another vessel, and sometime later, after a little post-dinner conversation, we retired to bed. A chocolate on our pillow was a lovely touch (as it would be every night) and we drifted off happy in the knowledge that we'd be commencing our journey to Silver Bank before midnight.

Sunday 8 February 2026

Day 4:

Silver Bank

Weather: Sunny with a north west-wind, 21°C

It hadn't been smooth sailing overnight, despite our stabilisers, and a few of the group were feeling a little under the weather this morning. Although no one surfaced for the Continental breakfast provided from 06:30, the lure of coffee saw people rise just after 07:00. The early birds caught the worm, so to speak, as a small pod of bottlenose dolphins rode our port side for a brief while before we slowed down considerably as we approached and crossed towards the northern side of Silver Bank. 15 minutes later, the sun peeked above the clear eastern horizon tinging scattered clouds with beautiful pink hues.

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At 07.20, a series of blows were seen far to the west and while we scanned in the relevant direction, a humpback breached literally right next to the boat! Rising like a phoenix from the depths in slow motion, it hung suspended for a brief period before thundering back down with a crash. We passed a 'rowdy group', an apt description for a series of males chasing a female hoping to mate with her, and were thrilled at the amount of humpback activity in general as numerous individuals glided through the water around us with ease. We whale watched from the lounge and decks when the hot breakfast option of bacon and eggs was served by purser Amber at 08:00, and did more of the same afterwards. Ashley, a diver amongst the crew, then donned her gear and jumped into the water, ready to attach us to our mooring. The rest of the team readied the two tenders for our first outings this afternoon and we watched with interest and growing excitement.

At 10:30, comedy hour ensued as we tried on the equipment that we had ordered online in advance of our arrival. Whilst the fitting of masks, snorkels and fins went relatively smoothly, wetsuits did not! After much heaving, ho-ing and giggling, we got there eventually, distracted by reef sharks close to the boat going after a pod of yellow snapper. We hit the lounge for a presentation on the 'Whales of Silver Bank' and were talked through etiquette whilst in the water with them.

The tease of our future hoped-for encounters was the centre of conversation over our chicken, garlic new potatoes and pasta salad lunch, after which we prepared for our time in the water. After we'd squeezed ourselves into our wetsuits once again, we lowered ourselves off the back of the boat to swim a few metres under the watchful eyes of our guides. Having had our swimming ability assessed and analysed, we were given tips on how to move through the water with our fins on but without splashing (on our sides with our front arm outstretched ahead of us, essentially).

We were then split into two groups that we would keep to throughout our time here, switching tenders on a daily basis to learn from different pilots. Lorenzo would pilot 'Challenger' with guide Simon, whilst Gill



would pilot 'Escort' with Guide TJ. We learnt how to board the tenders (no mean feat in large swells) as we'd be out in them for three to four hours or so at least, so we watched appreciatively as ice, water, and snacks galore were loaded first. Next up came our snorkel gear, sunscreen, hat, sunglasses and cameras, etc., stored either in dry bags we'd brought with us, or sealed in Tupperware boxes provided by Explorer II. Finally, we braved the substantial waves ourselves and slid across the fenders down into the tenders, aided by the crew. Once safely ensconced in them, we set off for an afternoon of trying to find cooperative whales all here to mate and breed amongst the relative shelter provided by the 1,300 or so heads of coral rising up from Silver Bank itself.

Once on our way, we readied ourselves to enter the water for a mock whale encounter. Testing our ability to follow the hand instructions we'd been talked through earlier, we thankfully passed and clambered back up the ladder into the tenders, intent on now finding the real thing. The water had been surprisingly warm (it averages 25°C) and the sun was beating down under clear blue skies. Despite the amount of whale activity recorded earlier, it had quietened down substantially and for an hour or so, we didn't see much other than waves breaking over the coral heads dotted just below the surface. Suddenly, a blow at our 1 o'clock was followed by a series of breaches, including a chin breach. This huge burst of power never fails to amaze and we remained in the area, watching for fluke prints and using a stopwatch to keep tabs on how long the whale had stayed under so that we could guesstimate when it might reappear.

While we waited, those of us on Escort heard that Challenger had by now dispatched its cargo (i.e., half of our group) into the water for what is known as a 'fly by'. What this means is that if whales are inquisitive but not stopping as such, the crew will facilitate a quick entry into the water for the group to watch them pass. We learnt that they'd enjoyed multiple encounters (five in fact) with not only a relaxed female and her

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calf, but a male escort too. What a fantastic result for our first afternoon! We were thrilled for them and eager to experience it for ourselves, too.

Escort therefore made its way over towards Challenger getting great views of all three humpbacks breathing on the surface. On Gill's command, TJ, our guide, lay on his stomach over the side of the tender and slipped into the water. We were asked to join him as silently as possible, so did the same. It took a moment to comprehend what we were seeing. To our right was the calf, head on and motionless, white flippers hanging down by its side. Directly in front of us, side on, was the massive girth of Mum, her tail suspended and enormous flippers stationary. We had the impression that she was still, her movements imperceptible, yet she was undeniably drifting to the left. The escort was beneath them, his outline faint but his flippers giving his presence away. The calf moved towards its Mum.



Image by Pauline Grainger

Time stood still. There was a sense of wonder, of awe, and an overwhelming sense of calm. We were incomprehensibly close to them, and there was absolutely no fear. We floated, pinching ourselves at the sheer wonder of the moment. We righted ourselves in the water as they moved off and we returned to our tender, almost speechless. As we held on to a rope along the side of the tender waiting to climb back onboard, the incredulity of what we'd just experienced firsthand hit us and one word was mentioned over and over, "Sublime". We were asked if we wanted to go in again. Errr, yes please. The tender was expertly manoeuvred into position and as we slipped over the side once more for a closer look, the escort spy hopped directly in front of us. When we looked down, the calf was ahead of Mum, balancing and circling around her rostrum, maintaining close contact with her. The escort moved directly across our line of vision and we enjoyed another few minutes (we think, but who knows!) of marvellousness. What a first afternoon!



Once back on the tender, the escort positioned himself right next to us and continually raised his flipper only to slam it down hard on the water surface. The white ventral side was tinged pink, a result of the blood rushing to the area, and half of his tail was held aloft too. With every slap, the sound reverberated and we clearly understood that he was warning us to back off as he wanted to claim the female. She, however, had her calf to look after and was not interested. She loitered close to us and he eventually moved off, so we grabbed another chance to jump in, marvelling at our luck to spend a little more precious time in the water. We didn't stay in long as the wind was picking up, but as we got out, the escort surfaced perhaps 20 metres away and

resumed his flipper slapping. Seeing this from the water level was really quite something.

We were home half an hour later just after 17:00, rinsing off our cameras and equipment, hanging up our wetsuits to dry, and showering before settling down for snacks and drinks during Happy Hour. We split up over the various decks, soaking up the evening sun and watching blows, baby breaches and dorsal fins all around. The sun started to set and despite being told what to do to try and capture or see the 'green flash' so often seen over the ocean, we were unsuccessful. We weren't worried as we'd have tomorrow, the day after that, and after that, and so on! Dinner was a sensation of pork tenderloin, cheesy orzo, ratatouille and spinach salad, followed by apple crumble. For those who then wanted to watch the Super Bowl final, means were made available, while most of the group took advantage of an early night after a spectacular and

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whaletastic first day on Silver Bank.

Monday 9 February 2026

Day 5:

Silver Bank

Weather: sunny with a brisk northerly wind, 21°C

There were more takers for Continental breakfast at 06:30 this morning, but the omelettes made to order from 07:00 trumped the former. Several humpbacks passed by while we ate and by 08:15 sharp, the entire group were ship shape and ready for departure as instructed. The sun was shining but there was a hefty wind and conditions were decidedly choppy. We were excited regardless and set off knowing that although it may be tough going in terms of finding whales due to sea spray, we were up for the challenge!

The cloud cleared as the morning went on, leaving blue skies and gorgeous turquoise ocean in its wake, but the wind and swell remained strong. There was very little sign of life with just one breacher repeatedly soaring high on the horizon around 11:00. We were offered wraps (cheese, cheese and ham or cheese and turkey), fresh fruit and chocolate as we continually scanned the waves with just a few blows here and there catching our attention. They were far, far away but closer to us, on more than one occasion, the burnt orange carapace of an Olive Ridley turtle could be seen as was a solitary magnificent frigate bird.

After three hours of searching in ever-increasing swells, we headed for home, where a delicious chicken curry, dhal, poppadum and salad lunch awaited us. The plan was to head out again at 14:15 but it was down to Lorenzo to make the final decision as the wind still hadn't died down. With 15 minutes to go, we got the green light, donning our wetsuits with surprising speed. We were getting better at this!

Under initially sunny skies, all was quiet for the first hour and a half that we were out, but then the fun began.

Three adult humpbacks came into view off our bow, remaining on the surface at our approach. We followed



them for a short while as they glided along effortlessly, parallel with us. It became evident that we were in the midst of a rowdy group, with a female being pursued by two keen males. What ensued was 50 minutes of thrilling whale watching. One male was keen to show off his athleticism, performing one lazy low breach after another (image credit: Rowena Green), whilst the other flipper slapped with aplomb. At times, all we could see was a tangled mess of tails and flippers above the water. They kept us on our toes as we tried to follow their progress underwater by watching their fluke prints. When surfacing to breathe, their exhalations sounded like roars, the result of their extended exertions. Twice they came at us head-on, ducking underneath our tender at

the last minute, one letting out a stream of bubbles, and the other hovering literally just below us.

We approached an area thick with coral heads, watching an array of colours come to life in the ocean as the rushing white water became mint, green, teal and tan as it washed over the obstacles in its path. We then

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passed a wreck, rusted to perfection, before returning home as thick cloud cover swept across the sky. Although we hadn't been in the water, we were getting utterly soaked by spray, which proved to be a giggle-eliciting, exhilarating and energising end to a fantastic afternoon.

Once back on board Explorer II, we rinsed off our complimentary salt scrub exfoliation (!) under hot showers and came together to discuss what we'd experienced during Happy Hour. We also indulged in some retail therapy as Silver Bank whale merchandise was out on show from T-shirts to hoodies and visors to ponchos. More than satisfied with our purchases, we tucked into roast beef that just melted in your mouth, with potato wedges, cauliflower cheese and salad. Finished off with cheesecake and raspberry coulis, it was another meal of champions. Miguel the Ecuadorean chef was proving himself to be nothing short of legendary!



Lorenzo then delivered a presentation on 'Behaviour and Communication' before we hit the hay, ready for more cetacean adventures tomorrow.

Tuesday 10 February 2026

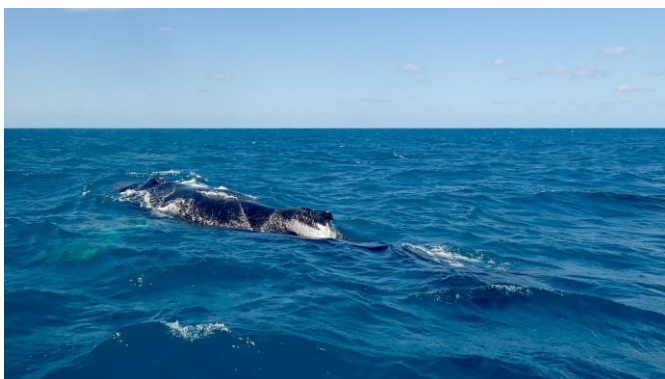
Day 6:

Silver Bank

Weather: Sunny and warm with a brisk wind, 21°C

A stunning day dawned a deep shade of crimson as we were offered hash-browns, cheesy sausages and eggs 'our way'. The wind was still strong, making entry into the tenders at 08:30 challenging again, but we couldn't wait to get out there. Both tenders set off in different directions and over the course of the morning, observed much activity signifying plenty of whales in the vicinity. The majority were travelling quickly through the water, providing no chance for any swims, so we sat back and enjoyed the ride.

Regardless, under blue skies, there were several standout moments. Those aboard Escort immediately enjoyed close encounters with several pairs of whales. During the first, a female was being pursued, somewhat relentlessly by a male, and despite repeated tail breeches and slapping to demonstrate her displeasure, he kept up with her. She clearly had enough on her plate without us adding to the mix, so after following them for a while we continued on our way.



Later, two more whales, most likely a male and female, teased us for some time as they veered ever closer, offering us tantalising glimpses before diving only to re-appear a little further away. They'd join us time and time again, breathing so loudly at times, that the sound was likened to a trumpet blow. They wouldn't settle but as a final hoorah, moved directly beneath our starboard side, hovering just a metre or two below us and providing a glorious silhouette of their tails. As one vanished, the other followed with a seriously impressive downward thrust of its tail, leaving us for dust.

Challenger on the other hand, after a very quiet morning, had a supremely close encounter with a breacher.

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Erupting out of nowhere, the whale caught everyone unaware and rather rudely, once they'd got over the fantastic surprise of this burst from the deep and had their cameras ready for him to do it again, he didn't perform! A fantastic flying fish and an Olive Ridley turtle completed their morning's viewing.

Our 'Taco Tuesday' lunch certainly delivered on taste and in terms of the weather, despite the ongoing wind, general visibility appeared to be improving too. The water was aqua perfection and as some whiled away the post-lunch lull with a sunbathe, others watched from the fly bridge as two single adult humpbacks lazily crossed our bow from right to left.

Experiences on the water reversed this afternoon with Escort viewing relatively few whales, although a tail slapper to our stern bathed in golden afternoon light followed by a series of flukes proved to be impressive. Challenger on the other hand, followed a substantial rowdy group from the get-go. Starting with three individuals, the group increased in size as they followed it, ending up with an impressive eight whales. Witnessing a variety of behaviours amongst the melee, so engrossed in the sighting were they that when Lorenzo and Simon stopped to check their bearings, they were 13 kilometres from Explorer II and had lost sight of her completely! They carried on regardless, ending up in the midst of the action watching one whale trying to suppress another by holding it down underwater. They also observed a phenomenon that scientists have yet to explain, the 'wibbling' (technical term!) or shaking of dorsal fins. Estimating that it would take at least an hour for them to get home, they turned back but there was more to come. A tight right angled turn was performed at speed to get closer to some tail slapping action. When they reached the protagonist, another joined in with his fin, and needless to say, they returned home for Happy Hour absolutely glowing. The sighting was a highlight of the week.

We gathered on the top deck for sunset, discussing the events of the day, other travels, and whiled away a pleasant few minutes spotting shapes in clouds. Dinner was another triumph, Asian tapas, and laughter filled the air before Lorenzo took us through a presentation on 'Anatomy'. It had been another super day on Silver Bank.



Wednesday 11 February 2026

Day 7:

Silver Bank

Weather: Sunny and warm with a nice breeze, 21°C

Today got off to a good start with French bread and bacon for brekky, but little did we know that it was about to get waaaaaaaay better! Whether it was the whale PJs worn by the crew, Helen's whale socks and ear-rings, or the calmer weather we don't know, and we didn't care to ask. All we can say is that it was a magnificent day to snorkel with humpbacks!

Challenger set off first, as usual, heading south in the direction of a series of blows. When we caught up with the owners, they were surfacing every eight minutes or so and were clearly travelling, so we stopped and

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bobbed for a while, hoping to pick up more stationary whales in due course. Escort meanwhile had moved just slightly to the west of Explorer II and called us in to their position advising they'd been able to swim with a courting pair, witnessing a 'dancer', whereby a male gently sways and moves, trying to captivate the female. A beautiful sight. At our approach, the initial group got out of the water and we donned our gear in anticipation of a dip, but the whales had different ideas. They were moving together, following each other in circles, and they disappeared just as we entered the water. Popping up moments later right next to Escort, we re-positioned and were given the ok to slip over the side again. We were rewarded with a wonderful, albeit brief, visual before we lost them again.

Choosing to watch them from above in the hope that they may settle, it was difficult to anticipate where they may appear next but with us in the water once more, they drifted directly beneath us dissolving into the depths. Back they came so we were in and out in a case of organised chaos! When re-boarding the tender, we'd sometimes be told to stay in, resulting in a supremely close encounter for two lucky clients who ended up eyeballing the whales at incredibly close range. Another highlight of the week for sure.

With everyone now back aboard both tenders, we sat in the sun waiting to see what the whales would do next. They moved east and we followed, their backs protruding and arching as they cut through the surface water with ease. Another male arrived on the scene and we continued to stay with them for the next 40 minutes or so, observing a variety of behaviours including rolling, flipper slapping and tail breaching, plus brief moments of rest. The female at one point rolled onto her back and held her flippers aloft towards the sky in what can only be described as a beautiful and hallowed moment.

By 10:30, it was all over but my word, we were in the debt of the wildlife Gods. We'd been back in the water repeatedly and enjoyed some wonderful whale watching. We drifted for a while, scanning for further blows, instead being treated to some incredible clean out of the water breaches on the horizon. We told jokes (not fit for publishing, I'm afraid!) and pushed on a little further, again, constantly on the search for activity.

Escort happened upon a female, calf and accompanying male but they didn't hang around, while Challenger followed distant blows to the east, passing Explorer II where our taste buds were tantalised by the smell of frying burgers. We continued, the flipper of one whale glowing aquamarine underwater, thus giving away its presence as it navigated around a coral head, closely followed by another. They disappeared into the deep while Simon was repeatedly put into the water to ascertain the condition of an old mooring as the Caribbean Cetacean Alliance shall soon be visiting. During his dips, we lapped up the colours in the ocean and he pointed out three Olive Ridley turtles who popped their heads up in perfect synchronisation. By now it was approaching 12.20 so we hot-footed it back in time for tomato soup and a 'build your own' burger lunch. Chips and onion rings completed the picture and suffice to say, we were all on cloud nine after a simply wonderful morning, but it was about to get better. Truly extraordinary in fact.

At 14:15, we were back out there scanning and wondering how we could top earlier events. Those aboard Challenger spotted blows to the south and headed towards them. Timing their breathing intervals, we watched them submerge and re-emerge several times before leaving them be as they were on the move, more interested in pursuing each other than a potential encounter. Two more blows signified another duo nearby, so we changed course to follow them. This proved to be an excellent move.

A mother and calf, we followed them for over an hour as multiple males, escorts and challengers came and went, surging in from behind, trying their luck for a while with the female, and then giving up to find a more accommodating partner. The calf stayed close to Mum throughout, its mini dorsal fin appearing above the

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waves regularly. They'd stop and we'd hope they may take a power nap but invariably a male would appear, disrupting the peace. Eventually, patience paid off and after Simon had gone into the water to track them below the waves a number of times, he gave the signal for us to join him... and it was wondrous.

Looking down on the whales, Mum and calf were lying horizontally in the water, the calf's head resting on Mum's rostrum. Suspended like so, time stopped as we floated directly above them with the escort stationary just below. The calf slowly, slowly began to rise, took a breath at the surface literally metres from us and then rejoined Mum. Twice this happened while we tried to assimilate that for this brief glorious period we were party to their world in this silent sanctuary. What an absolute privilege. A deep sense of calm once again prevailed as we returned to the boat, re-positioned and went in again. This time, only Mum and calf were immediately visible. As they slowly moved across our line of vision, the calf swam above Mum, a perfect 'mini me'. So focused on them were we that when the escort drifted by, he almost caught us unaware. We all felt that their tolerance of us in such close proximity was humbling, especially a new mother with her offspring. Words simply don't do the experience justice.



Escort came to join us having seen a number of whales beforehand, none of whom had been cooperative. They had however, seen another flying fish, magnificent frigatebirds, and had lowered their hydrophone into the ocean to listen to a singing whale only to have the sound rudely interrupted by the whistles and clicks of some unseen dolphins. Call it the vocalising equivalent of a photo bomb!



Together, taking it in turns in the water, the entire group became part of an incredible afternoon. Watching each other snorkel, taking photographs and video as we looked on, we were able to appreciate just how close we were getting. Suddenly, the escort did an almighty tail breach, resulting, of course, in the group retreating back to their tender (image credit: Rowena Green). He did another, and Mum and calf saw their opportunity to potentially move. With surprising speed, they were out of there, leaving us on an almighty high after a sensational day. The ride home was largely silent as we tried to assimilate the enormity of what we'd witnessed.

Happy Hour was indeed happy as we met up on the top deck, re-living special moments. We concentrated hard, all managing to see the hallowed 'green flash' as the sun rather obligingly chose to set in a break in the cloud on the horizon. Behind us, we became poetic as a beautifully soft palette of pink and purple hues descended into darkness. Later, our All American dinner of BBQ ribs, mash, cowboy beans, corn-on-the-cob and a variety of salads was, suffice to say, a success.

Thursday 12 February 2026

Day 8:

Silver Bank

Weather: sunny and warm, a little breeze, 21°C

We came here in the hope of snorkelling with humpbacks, and my word, we did that with bells on this morning. Fortified by ranchos huevos, both tenders came across whales immediately. From 08:30 through

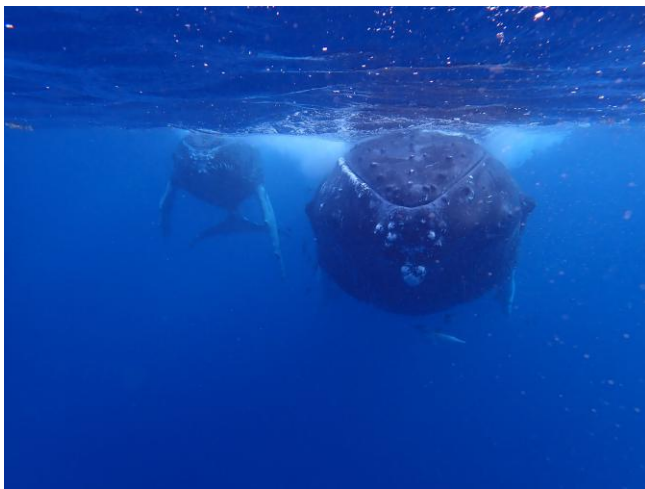
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to 13:00 (of course we delayed lunch), we were in and out of the water like yo-yos. Escort moved towards blows for a mother and calf, timing the breathing for the youngster to regular three-minute intervals. Rising and falling with the waves, they moved around us with ease and Mum dived directly beneath us, coming up the other side like a submarine.

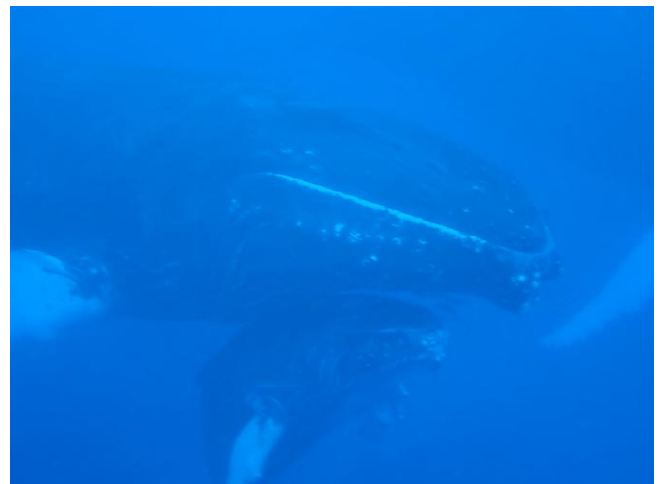


It appeared to be exercise time for the little one as it breached repeatedly, copying Mum. It also proved itself to be a little scamp. Time and time again it surfaced further away from Mum than we had experienced so far, and Mum made her displeasure at this behaviour well and truly known. For over ten minutes she stayed on the surface, slapping her all black tail down with intense vigour and might as we watched on, incredulous, from metres away. She, quite simply, became a powerful force of nature and we felt sure that if the calf didn't learn to respect her boundaries, there would be trouble ahead.



After that thrill, we made our way over to Challenger who had found the same mother, calf and escort that we swam with yesterday afternoon. They were close to Explorer II and although the whales had taken a while to settle, by the time we arrived, they'd already been in the water twice. Usually, we swim side on with the whales where possible, but this time they came head-on. It was incredible (image credit: Nicola Diamond). They were so relaxed with us that for the rest of the morning, we rotated tenders, spending 20 minutes or so in their company each time, sharing the magic. Pure and simple, we just couldn't get enough of them.

Mum and the escort were essentially snoozing, lying horizontally in the water as the calf intermittently came up to the surface to breathe. Sometimes the calf would remain on the surface, watching us, and at others it would dive straight back down to the safety of Mum, going underneath and perching directly beneath her throat to rest, thereby defying its own buoyancy. It sometimes came so close that we could look into its eye, count its ventral pleats and notice the scarring on its tail and body, the result of rubbing against Mum's barnacles. Every now and then, the female twisted her right flipper repeatedly, akin to us moving our arm around in our shoulder socket. Their proximity was breathtaking.



We had a few 'interesting' moments. Escort looked on as a new mother-calf pair swam towards the Challenger group already in the water with our trio. We could clearly read the hand signals of Simon steering them back towards the tender quickly. We weren't surprised at his reaction when we learnt that mothers with calves don't generally respond well to other mother-calf pairs coming through.

Challenger meanwhile, observed the Escort group become the filling in a whale sandwich as the male escort

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who had been lying so calming directly beneath us whilst we swam side on with the mother calf pair, decided to come up for air. We bunched together knowing that all three whales had been well aware of our presence for some time, so would hopefully move out of the way. This they duly did. Phew!

After five to seven swims per tender, we retraced our steps to Explorer II for another delayed lunch (whales always come first...obviously) that was worth the wait. Mahi mahi and shrimp in a coconut sauce with rice, salad, and avocado slices the size of melons awaited us and this afternoon's departure was pushed back to 15:00, allowing for a little downtime between excursions.

Both tenders had a wonderful final afternoon with Challenger spending quality time with multiple whales on the surface, but it was a baby breacher who undoubtedly stole the show. Just as the clock reached five-ish and Lorenzo and Simon were heading for home, a mother calf pair dove in front of them and the opportunity for a final swim was too good to miss. Three clients went (intentionally) overboard while the others watched the proceedings from the tender. It was meant to be.

Escort, on the other hand, found a mother, calf and escort trio pretty much immediately and remained with them all afternoon. The calf was the smallest we had seen yet, with TJ estimating it to be perhaps two or three weeks old. We got in the water repeatedly, often leaving our cameras onboard in order to fully immerse ourselves in these final moments. We had one especially close swim by, the calf next to us with Mum beyond, as we swung our arms back to create a little distance between us. It proved emotional. On our last entry, all three whales turned tail and with barely discernible tail thrusts, slowly disappeared into the blue. It was a fitting farewell, on their terms, as it should be.



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It was with mixed feelings that we gathered on the top deck for sunset as usual, with some leaving earlier than others due to the offer of a boiler room tour from engineer Mark. The BBQ was out on the sun deck, grilling filet mignon, and we gravitated towards the dining room for a feast of potato dauphinoise, broccoli and a selection of salads. Nightcaps were poured, rum crème no less, and we retired for our last night at sea.

Friday 13 February 2026

Day 9:

Silver Bank to Ocean World Marina

Weather: overcast, 21°C

Waking to a decorated lounge and dining area, we celebrated a birthday onboard during breakfast and cast adrift from our mooring, setting sail for land shortly after 07:00.

From the top deck, under banks of low, grey cloud, we scanned the surrounding seas for humpback activity, lost in a reverie of thoughts as we re-lived impossibly special moments from the last incredible week. Breaches, backs and blows dotted the horizon, a prolonged spy hop was closer, and nostalgia set in at what we were now leaving behind.

At 09:30, we gave back all rental equipment and from 10:00, we checked out, retrieved our passports and settled bills. Silver Bank merchandise was displayed once again and many of us succumbed to yet more purchases... mementoes of a momentous week!

During the course of the day, we relaxed and chatted, went through photos and updated journals, packed etc, and at midday, sat down to relish our last lunch courtesy of Miguel the Great. He saw us off in style with peanut chicken, rice, spiced cauliflower and of course, another master salad. Land came into sight and civilisation loomed as we docked back into Ocean World Marina at 15:00. Happy Hour softened the blow and we enjoyed a top deck picnic, a smorgasbord of cold cuts and cheeses once again, as we updated friends and relatives with our adventures now that we had WiFi once more.

Dinner tonight was to be at a local restaurant, Los Tres Cocos, and at 17:45 we departed in a convoy of taxis, meeting up again with Chris and Nicky Breen who would join us. Our three-course meal was fabulous and we returned to the ship for one last night on board with an awful lot to dream about.

Saturday 14 February 2026

Day 10:

Departure for the UK via Miami

Continental breakfast was served as always at 06:30 during which our checked bags were taken from our cabins and transferred to the marina for safekeeping during the morning. We said our goodbyes to our incredible crew and were back on terra firma by 08:30. Six clients were picked up for their onward travel arrangements and the rest of us hit a jewellery shop selling a local semi-precious gemstone, larimar, that had been fashioned into whale tail pendants, bracelets and ear-rings. We then walked across to Cofresi Hills, a hotel where we would while away a few hours before our transfer at 13:00. We had hoped to relax by the pool, but the weather had other ideas so we supped our coffees whilst sheltering from the rain.

We were collected promptly and drove through a busy Puerto Plata en route to the airport. Our flight to Miami was on time and our connection easy, but our incoming aircraft was late, resulting in a 90-minute delay to our Heathrow flight. Eventually taking off around midnight, we settled down to contemplate what can only be described as a stupendous and rather exceptional trip.

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Sunday 15 February 2026

Day 11:

Arrive in London

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Checklist for Swimming with Humpbacks on Silver Bank



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
	MAMMALS							
1	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncata</i>	✓					
2	Humpback whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	BIRDS							
1	Magnificent frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>		✓		✓	✓	

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