

Action Outdoors Diving FAQ

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?

79 miles to Stetson Bank and 65 miles to Kraken ship dive both are southeast of Freeport Texas.

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! The Kraken ship has big schools of fish and all kinds of invertebrates with a few species of coral.

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

How many divers?

Fraiche Catch carries 6 passengers, the Captain who is also on deck dive supervisor, and a deck-mate for a total of 8 people.

Can non-divers go?

Non-divers are welcome to come along as part of the 6 passengers.

How are the accommodations?

Fraiche Catch has berths for four below in full AC, and shaded areas up on deck that are partially AC. Both fresh and salt water wash-downs are available in the cockpit. DON'T FORGET YOUR TOWEL!

Is there a TV?

There is satellite television as well as XM Sirius Radio.

Boarding

Take your seasickness precautions

Early! When should we get there?

The boat boards promptly at 5:00 am so you should arrive around 4:30 am 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 trip day.

Where do we park?

Parking is adjacent to the boat at the first docks to the right upon entering the Bridge Harbor Yacht Club. .

Diving

Certification and age?

Divers must hold a minimum certification of open water or junior open water and be at least 12 years old. All divers between the ages of 12 and 15 MUST dive with either a parent or appointed Guardian by parent. Non-diving minor children will not be allowed unless there is a parent or appointed Guardian by parent aboard to supervise them at all times, including during dive windows.

Unaccompanied minors?

Minor children coming without a parent or legal guardian upon boarding must provide the crew with an originally signed and notarized Action Outdoors 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?

Three dives per trip. These are day trips only. In the near future we may include an over night trip at a different site. Typical KRAKAN trip: Total of 3 dives per day trip. Typical Stetson trip: total of 3 dives. Typical FLOWER GARDEN trip: 2 dives on one buoy and 1 dive on different buoy. After last dive of the day we will begin our journey back to Freeport. The near-shore rigs are all being removed, so the near-shore rig dive has been deleted from the schedule. Surface interval between dives will be determined by Captain or on deck Dive supervisor, no less than two hours is standard.

How are the dives conducted?

The boat dive supervisor will give a thorough briefing en route 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 8:00 am, 11:00 am, and 2:00 pm, and 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.

Dive profiles?

All 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 per day 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 starboard side of the boat. It's about a 1 foot drop that looks a lot higher for you tall guys, but you'll be wet before you know it. The boat has a ladder secured to the swim gate 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 spear guns 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 within standard open water or Nitrox certification. Nitrox is set to 32 percent only, due to time limit of 3 dives in one given day. Anyone violating the depth limits will be required to sit out the next dive. A second depth limit violation and the diver's return to diving, is at the sole discretion of the Captain.

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 following 24 hours. 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 following trip. The boat dive supervisor is 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 in their primary cylinder will be required to sit out the next dive. Then the diver's return is at the sole discretion of the Captain. 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 allowed by properly equipped and certified solo divers.

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!

Tanks?

All tanks are divers responsibly. Daily trip require (3) 80 cubic only due to space on vessel.

Pony Bottles?

Pony bottles in use aboard the Fraiche Catch are considered redundant safety equipment for emergency situations only. Not for use for out off air in main tank. Will treat as a violation and will be determine by Boat Captain.

Weights?

Divers need to provide their own weight and weight belt.

Rebreathers?

Rebreathers are not allowed.

Scooters/DPV's?

Diver propulsion vehicles are not allowed.

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) are mandatory and whistles or Dive-Alert's are high recommended. It's a big ocean.

Gloves are allowed and many divers like to have them for

handling the down-lines.

Personal Gear

Dive gear is stored on the dive deck. Clothes and dry things are stored below, 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.

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.

Medical conditions?

Any diver with a medical condition which is a contraindication to diving, 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 the diver's specific medical condition and that the diver is medically fit to dive. Standard medical release forms alone will not be accepted. Please contact Divers Alert Network about your medical condition.

Food

Bring what you want to eat or drink. The boat supplies iced bottles of water. There is microwave for heating as well as plenty of shared cold storage, so plan on leaving your personal coolers in the car.

Drinks?

No alcohol consumption until the diving is finished. Beer, wine and liquor are welcome in moderation. Your first beer of the day marks the end of your diving for the day. Personal ice chests and glass containers are not allowed on board

Tips

How do the tips work?

Tips are voluntary and performance based. We recommend a 15% 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 Captain and Deck mate.

Refunds

If we cancel prior to leaving the dock due to weather, mechanical problems, etc. refunds will be made. Partial refunds for any trip cut short due to mechanical problems or crew issues will be determined by the Captain on a case by case basis based on number of dives offered. No refunds will be issued for any trip cut short for other than

mechanical or crew issues such as a medical emergency with a diver, bad weather forming in the Gulf, etc. These are circumstances that are out of our control.

Trip Insurance

Trip insurance is highly recommended. You can check with your DAN insurance or Travel Guard for trip insurance options.