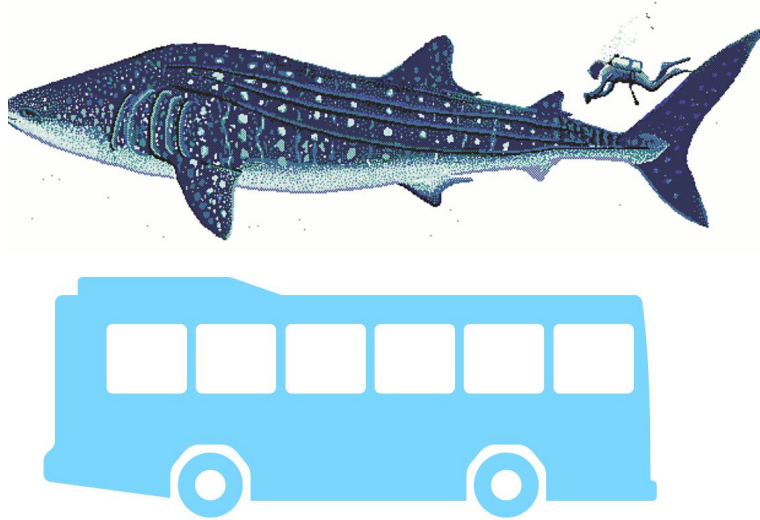


## THE GENTLE GIANTS OF LA PAZ BAY, MEXICO



WHALE SHARKS CAN REACH UP TO 12 METERS! THEY ARE HARMLESS TO HUMANS BECAUSE THEY ARE FILTER FEEDERS, WHICH MEANS THEY FEED ON TINY ORGANISMS KNOWN AS PHYTOPLANKTON!

WHALE SHARK MEXICO MANAGED TO CHANGE LOCAL RULES TO PROTECT THESE GENTLE GIANTS AND THE COMMUNITY HAS NOW MADE THEM PART OF THEIR LOCAL IDENTITY.



(Whale shark Mexico.com 2019)

'WHALE SHARK MEXICO' is an organization that started in 2001 by [Dr. Deni Ramirez](#) and its main focus is the conservation of whale sharks through research, education, and sustainable management. This conservation initiative managed to make whale sharks the 'community animal' through [education](#) & [outreach](#), it managed to change [rules](#) & [regulations](#) on how to interact with the sharks, and it is doing [science](#) to collect data and learn more about how to protect these gentle giants.

## EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Whale Shark Mexico engages with the community in many ways including talks in schools, cafes, and restaurants that cover whale shark biology and importance of their protection. This allowed for the community of La Paz to adopt the whale shark as the animal that **represents them**, and this has bolstered the stewardship of whale sharks in the area.

Whale Shark Mexico has trained **151**

Tour Operators as well as getting the community interested in participating during Whale shark day.

**400** children were involved in the construction of a 10 metre whale shark sculpture made from **recycled** materials. This was then used in 3 events involving around 1200 attendees total.

They also created a human sculpture of a shark involving **123** volunteers and assistants with the hopes of spreading conservation messages.



## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

*YOU CAN BE A PART OF THIS!*

Join the [citizen science](#) program and learn:

- ★ Photo identification methods
- ★ Community outreach
- ★ Environmental education
- ★ Field work experience
- ★ Communication skills



(Pablo Madrigal)

The citizen science program will let you help scientists collect information about whale sharks when swimming with them. This can make your experience more valuable because not only will you get to swim with them, but you will be learning a lot and

helping the species. You will learn about their biology & ways in which you can help in their conservation through photo identification, and injury analysis.

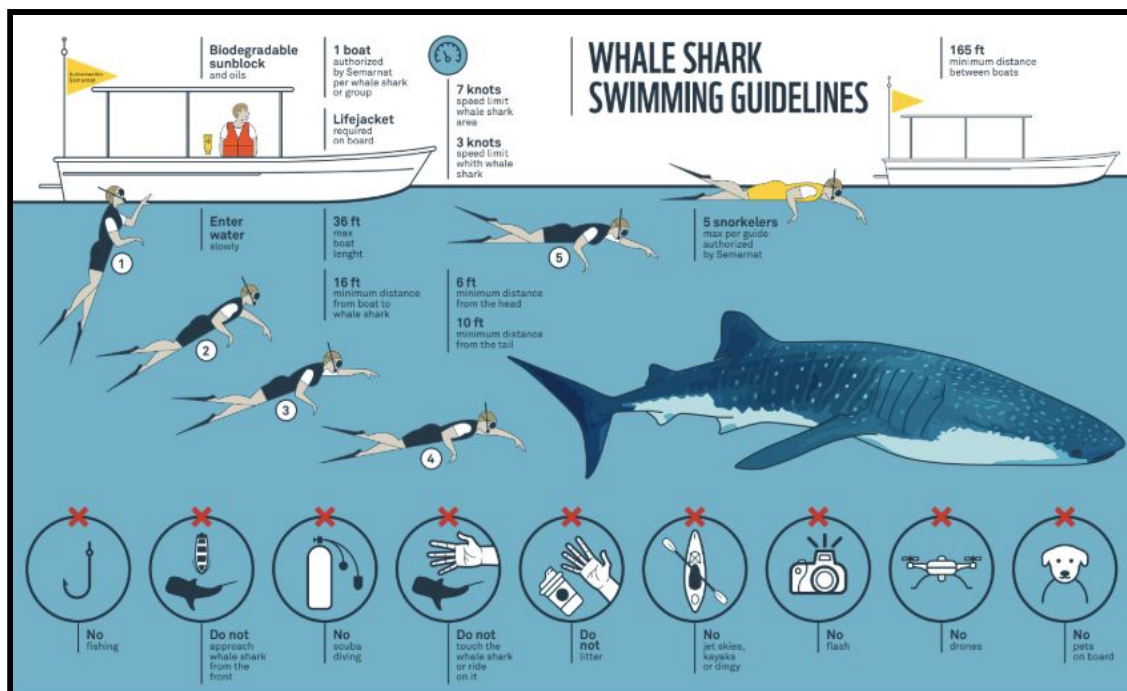
## WHALE SHARK RULES

'Whale Shark Mexico' was able to talk to people in the area who were in charge of setting rules for swimming with whale sharks. They managed to create some **new rules** that would make sure the whale sharks were not being hurt or annoyed by people nearby. These new rules made sure everyone was aware of **what to do** and **what not to do** around them, and when it was ok to swim with them to make sure no one interrupted them while they looked for food.

### DO'S & DON'TS

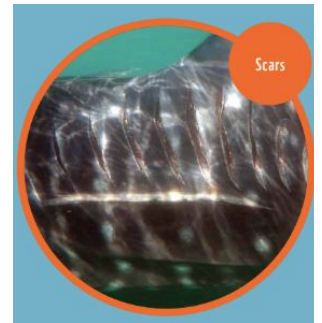
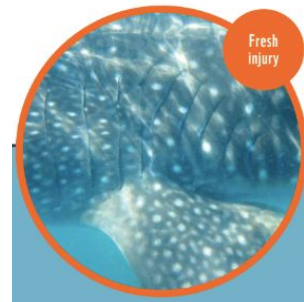
The rules for swimming with whale sharks are very clear and make sure these gentle giants are being taken care of by the community and by the tourists. Some rules include:

- ★ One boat per whale shark or group of them
- ★ No more than 5 people per whale shark
- ★ No touching the shark
- ★ Only biodegradable sunscreen allowed
- ★ Slow down boat around a shark



## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

These rules are very important so that the whale sharks are not injured by boats or scared by the people. These rules help prevent injuries like these:



(Ramirez-Macias, 2017)

## CHECK FOR THE FLAG!

If you want to snorkel with whale sharks, only companies with a special permit can take you. You can recognize them because they will have a flag with a whale shark on it. If they have this it means they were **trained** and are **well informed** of the rules.



(WhaleSharkMexico.com, 2019)

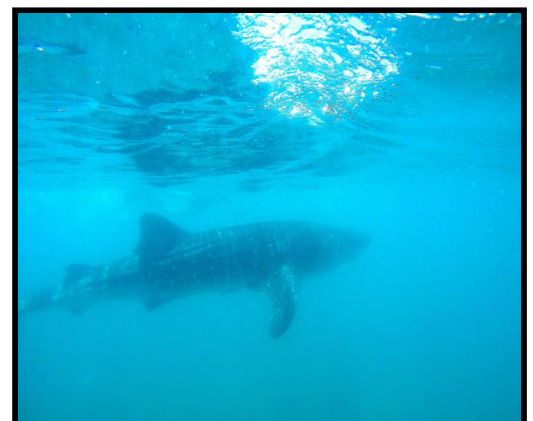
For more information about the rules visit: <https://www.whalesharkmexico.com/management-conservation/>

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

(Pablo Madrigal)

### THE SCIENCE ABOUT WHALE SHARKS...

Over the years scientists and community members in La Paz have been observing and learning a lot about whale sharks. One of the best ways to learn about them and identify each whale shark, is by looking at the **dotted patterns on their bodies**.



Just like our fingerprints, every whale shark has a very unique pattern that sets them apart from other individuals. This helps scientists recognize each whale shark and overall estimate how many there are in the area.

By taking photos of them, scientists can also see if whale sharks have had any **injuries or cuts** on their skin. As we know, these accidents can happen because of tourism and private boats if they don't look out for whale sharks in the water.

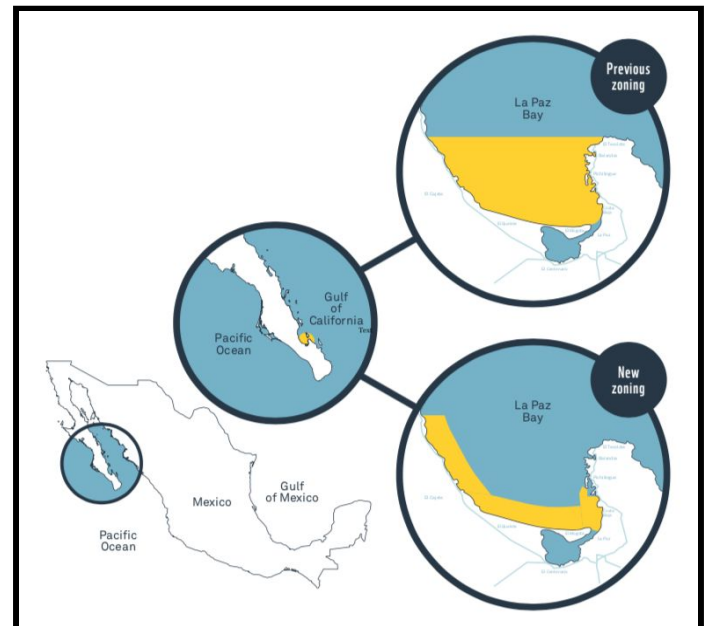
That's why it is key to carry out this scientific research and then follow the rules in place. Now people and whale sharks interact in a way that is **enjoyable & safe** for both people and whale sharks.

## WHERE CAN YOU SWIM WITH WHALE SHARKS?

Too many tourists gathering around an area with whale sharks can have harmful effects on these gentle giants. **Thanks to the hard work** done by scientists to know more about how to protect this species, powerful people in government decided to help conserve them and changed some important rules in La Paz.

This figure shows how the zone (in yellow) for whale shark interactions **became smaller** after a few years to allow whale sharks to be less disturbed by people.

(Ramirez-Macias, 2017)




## FINAL REMARKS

The work **Whale Shark Mexico** has accomplished has been successful in multiple levels, to the point that the community of La Paz has adopted whale shark as their local **celebrity animal**. They have also managed to have better rules to protect whale sharks from injuries and in doing so, educate tourists about them. Whale sharks are now better protected in La Paz, and **admired and respected** by locals and tourists.

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