

# Frequently Asked Questions

# Flower Gardens

## Contacts

### By phone?

Our booking office telephone number is (281) 970-0534 and can reach us by either cell or satellite service at most times of the day. The boat also has VHF and SSB radios on board.

### On the web?

[www.spreeexpeditions.com](http://www.spreeexpeditions.com)

### By e-mail?

[info@spreeexpeditions.com](mailto:info@spreeexpeditions.com)

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

## Boat

### How big?

100ft aluminum crew boat refit for diving in the Gulf. The boat has tank racks for each diver, a large camera table and camera rinse barrels, gear rinse tanks, 2 boarding ladders with a large swim platform, and a large sundeck.

### How fast?

The Spree is powered by three 12V71 Detroit Diesel engines and runs at a top speed of approximately 16 knots. She has two 30kw generators to keep the lights on and the air compressors pumping.

### How many divers?

The Spree carries 22 passengers, 2 trip leaders, and 7 boat crew, for a total of 31 people.

### Can non-divers go?

Non-divers are welcome to come along at full price. Snorkeling is allowed.

### Who are the crew?

The boat's crew consists of 2 Coast Guard licensed captains, 2 galley hands and 3 divemasters.

### How are the bunks?

The passenger bunks are arranged in 4 cabins of 4 and a large common area of 8, each bunk with it's own privacy curtain. The Spree's cabins have curtains across the entry. Bunks cannot be reserved. We provide sheets, blankets and pillows. DON'T FORGET YOUR TOWEL!

### Is there a TV?

Widescreen television with VCR/DVD and stereo. We have a selection of movies available, but you are more than welcome to bring your own. The crew would love to see something new! We also have cables for some video systems so you can play the tape from your last dive for all to see.

**Don't forget your log book and C-card!**

## Flower Gardens

### Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary web site

[www.flowergarden.nos.noaa.gov](http://www.flowergarden.nos.noaa.gov)

### How far is it?

110 miles south of the Texas/Louisiana border in approximately 350 ft of water.

### 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 are 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!

### What will I see?

Over 300 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

## Boarding

### Take your seasickness precautions early!

#### When should we get there?

The boat boards promptly at 8:30 pm the evening prior to the trip date, so you should arrive around 8:00 pm 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 last trip day.

#### Are bunks assigned?

No. Bunks are on a first-come, first-served basis at boarding time.

#### Where do we park?

After you have unloaded your gear next to the dock, you will move your car to the other side of the levee in a large grass parking lot.

## 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 a dive supervisor. Non-diving minor children will not be allowed unless there is a parent aboard to supervise them at all times, including during dive windows. The crew is not available for babysitting.



#### Unaccompanied minors?

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

2-day trip—potentially 7 dives. 3-day trip—potentially 11 dives.

#### Dive schedule?

Typical 2-day trip: 2 morning dives on the West Bank of the Flower Gardens. At lunch move to the East Bank and make 2 more day dives and 1 night dive. Move to Stetson Bank during the night and make 2 morning dives on Stetson before getting underway for Freeport.

#### How are the dives conducted?

The boat divemasters give a thorough briefing the night you board the boat, covering 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** 7:00 am, 10:30 am, 2:00 pm, 5:30 pm and 9:00 pm on a 5-dive day. 4-dive days usually start at 8:00 am. 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. Dives are not guided, so you can explore the reef at your own pace.

#### Dive profiles?

The boat-imposed depth limit is 130 fsw. Dives must be planned within recreational limits—no planned-decompression dives are allowed on recreational charters. Within those parameters, buddy teams plan and execute their own dives. Dive times 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 port (sometimes starboard) side of the boat. It's about a 5 foot drop that looks a lot higher for you tall guys, but you'll be wet before you know it. Both boats have 2 ladders secured to the swim platform 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 spearguns 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:

**Table divers:** 130 fsw/39 msw for the first dive of the day only, with a maximum allowable depth of 100 fsw/30 msw for each subsequent dive.

**Computer divers:** 130 fsw/39 msw per dive.

**Rebreather divers:** 140 fsw/42 msw per dive.

Anyone violating the depth limits will be required to sit out the next dive. Then the diver's return to diving is at the sole discretion of the Captain.

### Computer/Dive Table violations:

All dives will be planned and executed within the no decompression limits of the divers' computers or 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 24 hours. The boat divemasters are 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 life threatening situation and 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 to diving 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. Solo diving is only allowed by properly equipped and certified solo divers.

**Dive Window:** All divers must be in the water within 20 minutes of the opening of the dive window.



## 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 appropriate thermal protection. **Dive computers are HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

### Rental gear?

There is no rental gear or repair facility on board the boat. Divers need to bring everything with them they need to dive. Also bring your save-a-dive kits!

### Tanks?

The boat provides an aluminum 80 for all divers. Air or 32% nitrox is included in the charter price.

### Pony Bottles?

Pony bottles are considered redundant safety equipment for emergency situations only. Pony bottles equipped as a redundant gas supply with first and second stage regulators will be filled once at the beginning of the charter if needed.

### Weights?

Divers need to provide their own weight belt. The boat provides block lead—soft weight is not provided.

### Rebreathers?

Rebreather use is allowed on the Spree within certain parameters. Please refer to our rebreather policy.

### Scooters/DPV's?

Diver propulsion vehicles are allowed on the Spree on technical diving charters only.



### Anything special?

Dive computers are highly recommended. Computers help to maximize your bottom time. Surface signaling devices (See-me, safety sausage) and whistles or Dive-Alert's are required. It's a big ocean. Gloves are allowed and many divers like to have them for handling the down-lines. Bring your lights (primary, back-up and tank marker) for night diving.

## Personal Gear



### Luggage?

Dive gear is stored on the dive deck below the benches. Clothes and dry things are stored below your bunks in the berthing area, 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.

### Stuff to buy?

We have t-shirts, fleeces, caps and koozies. Major credit cards are accepted for all purchases on board, as well as personal checks and good old cash.

### 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 boat 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

### How's the food?

Plentiful and hot. You won't go hungry.

### Drinks?

Lemonade, Gatorade, water, coffee and hot chocolate are available all day. Sodas, beer and wine are available for a nominal fee. The bar closes at midnight. Yes, your first beer of the day marks the end of your diving for that day.

### Meals?

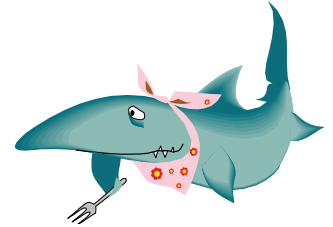
Served buffet-style throughout the day starting with a continental breakfast of rolls, fruit and coffee before the morning dive. After the first dive, a hot breakfast of eggs, bacon or sausage, biscuits and gravy, pancakes or breakfast tacos is served. Lunch is after the second dive and is usually sandwiches, soup, pasta salad or similar fare. Afternoon snack is after the third dive and based upon the creativity of our chef—dinner is after dive four and varies widely from roast to Mexican fare. After your night dive, a snack of warm brownies and vanilla ice cream will be waiting for you.

### Special diets?

Our galley hands are more than willing to accommodate restricted diets as long as they know in advance. Vegetarians that eat dairy products are easily accommodated. Low salt or no sugar are also easily arranged. Anyone on a very strict diet, like vegan or kosher, needs to call our office and make special arrangements. **PLEASE DO NOT BRING ANYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE REFRIGERATED.** The boat does not have room to store items that must be refrigerated or frozen—the coolers are already filled to the brim.

### Can I bring snacks?

Meals and snacks are provided from 6:00 am until midnight. For sanitary reasons, no food or drink is allowed below decks. **NO EXCEPTIONS.** Please do not bring food or drinks to the boat; if you can't make it without your Milky Way bars, turn them into the galley hands as you board the boat and they will keep them safe for you. Personal ice chests, sodas, beer, and glass containers are not allowed on board at all. Again, **please** do not bring anything that needs to be refrigerated.



## Tips

### How do the tips work?

Tips are voluntary and performance based. We recommend a 10% 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 divemasters and galley crew.