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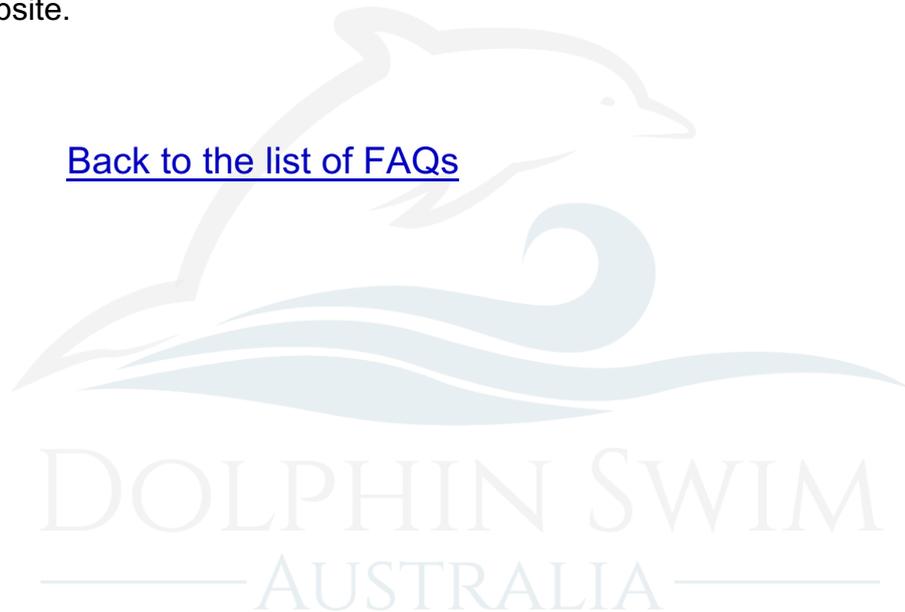
## When can I do the swim?

Our dolphin swims run from the first weekend in September to the last weekend in May, usually Thursday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday each week, given sufficient bookings.

More days of the week are available during the holiday seasons around Christmas & Easter.

Specific dates and availability can be found in the 'Bookings' tab of our website.

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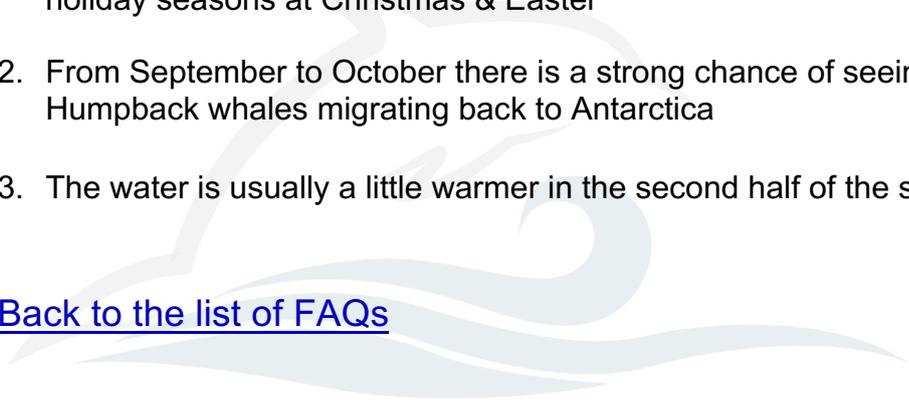
## What is the best time of year to do the swim?

There is no time when there are more dolphins than other times. It always depends on the day and what the dolphins are doing.

A couple of considerations are;

1. Usually we run swims Thur – Sat, but more days of the week during the holiday seasons at Christmas & Easter
2. From September to October there is a strong chance of seeing Humpback whales migrating back to Antarctica
3. The water is usually a little warmer in the second half of the season.

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## Why are the tours so early in the morning?

1. We need calm seas to conduct the swims safely and comfortably, and wind and swell conditions are always calmest very early in the morning.
2. By going out early, there is therefore less chance of cancellation due to rough conditions.
3. Also, from the research we know that dolphins mostly hunt at night and rest in the middle of the day. By going out early we interact with them when they are still awake/active and do not disturb their precious midday rest time.
4. Even if we didn't care about dolphins' rest, our success rate in finding dolphins early is high. DSA's CEO and the *Imagine* captains, (from decades of experience being out there during the day), believe that this would not be possible if we departed later in the day. Going early therefore means there's less chance you'll miss out on seeing/swimming with the dolphins.
5. Besides all that, it's a beautiful time of day and many of our guests love seeing the sunrise and being out on the water around dawn.

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## Why is the DSA swim great value?

1. Swims in confined, artificial settings with single, *captive* dolphins can cost over \$400, so compared to that this amazing opportunity to swim *with whole pods of wild dolphins* is great value. We also offer a Dolphin Swim Guarantee!
2. Importantly, please compare what your money is achieving. Captive facilities are zoos where animals are kept to entertain you. Entering a dolphin pool there is the same as paying to enter the tiny cage of a tamed Giant Panda to pat it. This is not an animal in its natural environment.

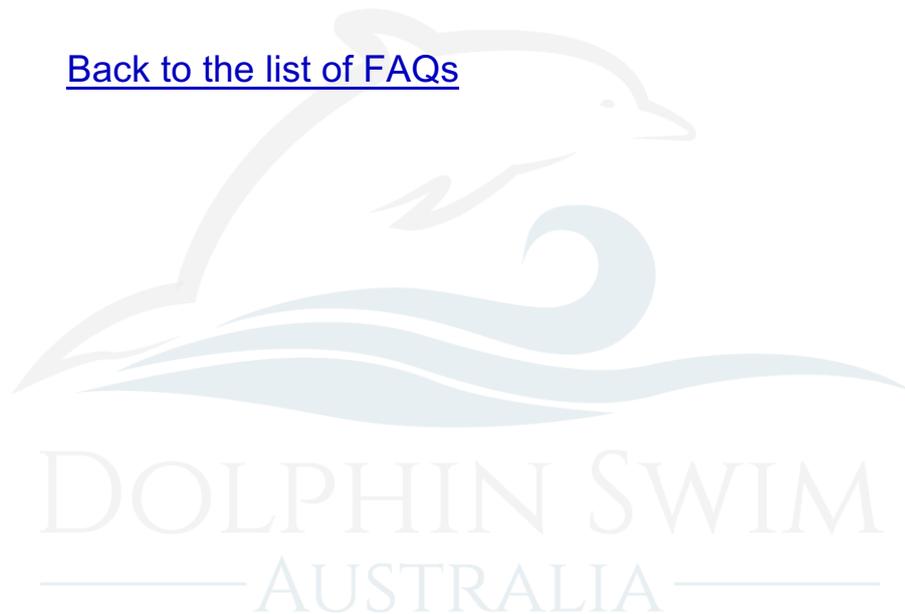
By contrast, before and after your encounter with DSA's dolphins they remain free and unharmed; in fact, they've had a lot of fun, and *you* have entertained *them!* If you buy the USB video of your amazing encounter you also support our research to find out more about these unstudied populations.

3. You enjoy the search for dolphins in their natural home off Port Stephens on a beautiful 16m-long, ocean-going catamaran with seven staff & crew. This is not an aquarium, an enclosure, or even a calm bay, but the Pacific Ocean. Your 'pool' is 165 million square kilometres in size and has an average depth of around 4 km.
4. Creating the opportunity for you to move along in the open ocean with large numbers of dolphins, *safely*, is complex. On the boat we have a Swim Assistant to keep you comfortable, a Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) to ensure the direction of travel and wave action is safe, and when you are in the water there are two dive masters within arm's reach of you at all times.
5. Because these are *wild, not trained* dolphins, our expert in dolphin behaviour (MMO) ensures we do not harass them or interrupt critical behaviours such as hunting or resting. This is something captive trainers have no knowledge of, nor need to worry about.

6. Our techniques are in fact the only ones in the world that make you part of wild pods of dolphins in the open ocean, and most guests who have done our swim agree that our rates are great value – please scan through some of the feedback on Tripadvisor and Facebook.

And don't forget that you get a 4-hour cruise, wetsuits & snorkelling equipment are provided free of charge, as is a light breakfast, and you will hear interesting talks on both the dolphins and the many other animals you encounter as you tour through the beautiful Port Stephens - Great Lakes Marine Park.

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## Why is the DSA swim the best dolphin-swim in the world?

1. Let's look at the alternatives: First, you could go to somewhere that dolphins are kept in tiny, chemically-treated swimming pools. This is like watching a racehorse pace around in a fumigated stable.
2. Second, some companies place you on a static line behind a stationary boat. Dolphins may come to investigate people, but rarely stay for long. By contrast, with DSA, the dolphins are bow-riding and will often stay with you for up to an hour.
3. Third, there are operations where you are dropped in front of moving pods. Often this permits only glimpses of dolphins as they swim quickly past. They are travelling and have no incentive to stay and get comfortable with you. In contrast, DSA's dolphins are motivated to stay tail-to-nose with you for long periods, because they are having fun on the bows of our boat. We are moving through the water *with* the dolphins
4. Finally, there are free-swim companies who take you to shallow bays. Dolphins in these locations often come there to rest after hunting in deep water all night. People swimming with them can disrupt this rest and exhaust the dolphins without knowing they are doing so. This is one of the reasons that, in Australia, swimmers must stay 50m or more away from wild dolphins.
5. DSA operates early in the morning, so as not to disturb mid-day dolphin rest times. The dolphins choose to swim with us and we have an awesome success rate for swims. Our wild dolphins are never chased, corralled or harassed, but free to choose to spend time with you or not. You move along with whole pods that are often less than 3m in front of you.
6. Finally, you stay in groups, tethered to the boat, resulting in greater safety.

These are the reasons that DSA is the best dolphin-swim in the world!

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## Why does a DSA 'Observer' get the best dolphin-watch?

1. Our cruises last for four hours, far longer than most dolphin-watch tours. Observers are often watching dolphins up-close for over half of that time.
2. The Common Dolphins we encounter are not 'habituated' to tourist boats, like many tours that visit estuarine species, such as Bottlenose dolphins, many times per day.

Bottlenose dolphins are often bored with tourist boats, so ignore them, and do not approach them closely. By contrast, our dolphins show enthusiastic interest in bow-riding and observing our human swimmers.

Tourist boats are not allowed to approach closer to 50m to any dolphins, so to see them up close they must choose to come to the boat, and on DSA swims they love to do this!

3. Many dolphin-watch boats are huge, so you are high off the water away from the action, and on some you cannot even see dolphins when they are bow-riding. On our boat, *Imagine*, the dolphins are only 1-2m away from you at the bows. From there you can see into their eyes, hear their vocalisations, examine the beautiful patterns on their bodies and marvel at their complex movements and social interactions.
4. Most other dolphin-watch tours encounter small pods of Bottlenose dolphins, whereas our Common dolphins are far more numerous. There are many days when we encounter between 100 and 300 dolphins in total, and sometimes that many all at once!

5. We operate in the Port Stephens Great Lakes Marine Park, which is full of sea life. This means you often see many other ocean creatures, especially numerous species of whales, sea lions and turtles.
6. Finally, our staff provide detailed, interesting and informative commentaries on the dolphins, the marine ecology of the area and the Marine Park.

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How well do I need to be able to swim?  
What fitness and skills do I need to do a swim?  
What if I have breathing problems?

We call it a 'swim', but while you are being towed along as part of the pod you do not actually swim at all – you should not even kick your legs. Rather, you just 'hang' by your arms, and relax as much as you can, holding on to the tow-rope and watching the dolphins. Being basically skilled at snorkelling is more important (see point 5 below).

We ask for your swimming ability as a basic indicator of your comfort in the water and physical fitness, which is also needed for other aspects of the experience. Think about these things to assess whether or not you would manage a swim:

1. There are three steps to reach the deck of *Imagine* when you arrive. If you could not climb & descend those steps three times in quick succession, then you might not be able to do the swim.
2. On the open ocean there is always wave action, which rocks the boat in three planes (pitch, roll and yaw), so at times you need some leg strength, balance and to be able to hold tightly to the railings as you move around on board.
3. To climb into and out of the springy bow-net at the start and finish of a swim takes leg, core and upper body strength, as well as reasonable flexibility.
4. During the swim you hold a rope and are towed slowly through the water, so some hand, wrist, arm & shoulder strength is required.
5. As far as skills go, it is valuable to be comfortable in the open ocean (although you are tethered safely under a boat), to be practised in using a mask and snorkel, and, especially to be able to clear water from your snorkel, so you don't lift your head.



Not lifting your head is important, as dolphins are like icebergs; 90% of the action you will see will be under the water. To best experience being 'part of the pod' you need to be looking under the water as much as you can. If conditions are choppy, this might mean needing to blast-clear your snorkel every couple of breaths, and/or several times in quick succession.

6. This last point suggests that people with heart problems that affect breathing, or anyone with other serious breathing difficulties should probably not do the DSA dolphin swim. Asthmatics, for example, should ensure their condition is well controlled, especially if it could be set off by cold temperatures, by inhaling water vapour, or by ingesting salty seawater.
7. Please note, finally, that when booking a DSA swim you agree to disclose to us any health issues that might impair your ability to participate in a swim, and that based on that disclosure, for your own safety, we may not permit you to do a swim. For further details, please see the Terms & Conditions under the 'Programs' tab.

Please view a few of the many videos of the swim on this website and on the DSA Facebook page which show clearly what the swim involves.

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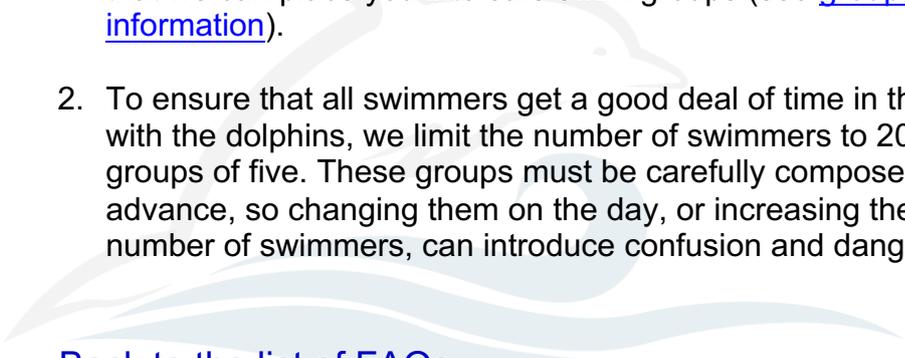
Can I book as an observer, but then change my mind and swim once on board?

Unfortunately not.

1. Again, safety comes first, as the swim can be strenuous. If you wish to swim you must first know what you will need to do. If you believe that you have the snorkelling skills and physical strength & flexibility to do the swim, then you may book on. During the booking process you then tell us what level of ability you have so that we can place you into safe swim-groups (see [grouping information](#)).
2. To ensure that all swimmers get a good deal of time in the water with the dolphins, we limit the number of swimmers to 20, or four groups of five. These groups must be carefully composed in advance, so changing them on the day, or increasing the total number of swimmers, can introduce confusion and dangers.

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## How long will we be in the water with the dolphins?

1. It can take time to find dolphins, and then our MMO must assess if they want to play with you. If a group of dolphins is, for example, feeding, then we will wait away from the feeding event or search for other dolphins that are more interested in bow-riding. We never chase or harass dolphins if they are not interested in playing with the humans we bring them.
2. During these 'set-up' times for each swim, please get engaged in the search, listen to the expert talks on dolphins and their ocean environment, and enjoy the light breakfast provided.
3. Our research, the first ever done in this area, has shown that (unlike inside Port Stephens) there are no resident dolphins that we can just 'go and find at home'. Hence, every trip is different, but on average we spend more than one third of the cruise time in sight of, or swimming with dolphins.
4. Being towed through the open ocean in amongst dolphins is a strenuous activity. For guests' comfort and safety we limit each swim to around 5-10 minutes, which is when many people's arms start getting tired.
5. Swim duration also depends a little on the temperature of the water. Even though you wear long wetsuits, in water below 20 degrees celsius five minutes is long enough for people to begin to get cold. To counter this, jump under our hot shower after your swim!
6. If we find dolphins early on the cruise, and they are happy to stay and play with us, then you may get a second or even third swim. While waiting for your next turn, enjoy [the best 'dolphin-watch' in the world](#) from the foredeck of *Imagine* whilst other groups are in the water.
7. Finally, it depends on bookings on the day. You enter the water in groups of 5, so if there are 15 guests, then a total of 6 swims will

get everyone in twice. However, with 20 guests, we have to achieve 8 swims for everyone to go twice.

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## Can I swim in the same group with my friends or family?

It's possible that you may not be grouped with your family members or partner. The main reason is for safety, and the second reason is to ensure that your experience swimming with the dolphins is not disrupted. The two staff looking after you during your swim can deal with two to three people having a problem at the same time. Beyond this we must stop the swim, which disrupts your experience, and we may also lose the dolphins.

This is why we collect information about your abilities and disabilities during book-in; so that each group has a 'healthy' mix of people with good-to-excellent abilities and only one who we anticipate may have difficulties in each group. We will not, for example, put two or more less-experienced snorkellers, very large people, or children in the same group, nor three of any of these together.

So you can see that it's quite a puzzle for us to form groups that will not break down and which will keep the dolphins' interest and hence provide the safest and best experience for everyone. After that, if it makes no difference, we do our best to keep couples, families or groups of friends together.

If you do find yourself without your partner in a group, please focus on enjoying the individual experience of 'you and the dolphins' which can be life-changing. On later swims the group make-up sometimes changes, so you may be able to go with your partner the next time around.

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## Can we take cameras in the water?

1. We ask you to leave cameras on board first and foremost for the safety of you and the other guests. When you are getting into and out of a bouncing net and the wash of waves, cameras can get out of control and cause injuries to you and others.
2. Cameras, even if attached to your body, can also get caught on harnesses, lanyards, in the net, around safety rails or around the tow-rope, again presenting a danger and/or delaying the swim for other guests while the problem is fixed.
3. Also for your safety; you have a lot to think about, it all happens very quickly, and so we need you to concentrate on the procedures. If you forget something critical while thinking about your camera, you can cause discomfort, interruption or danger (or all three) for yourself and other guests.
4. If the camera is not secured well, in the rush of water you can easily drop it. In 40m of water it will be irretrievable, and you will have lost valuable equipment.
5. They are all very practical reasons, but the *main* distraction is from the experience itself. We know that guests who are present and looking at the dolphins internalise the amazing experience they are having. Those who spend their entire time trying to get underwater pics or footage, however, can fail to really take in the magic of what they are witnessing.
6. Besides the safety and experience issues, we also know that hand-held shots taken whilst being dragged through the water are rarely of much quality. Often all you get is jerky movements, white-water and bubbles.

7. If you would like stable, good-quality footage, which will have you in the shot, then invest in a copy of our custom-made USB-video. By doing so you contribute to marine research, as the profits from video sales go to support what is the very first study of this dolphin population.

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## What about sharks?

1. Sharks do not recognise humans as prey. If they did, there would be 1000 attacks per day in Australia during summer, and that does not happen.
2. Even if they did prey on humans, sharks usually attack weak, solitary animals. We are in groups of six in the water, so we present a large, scary target.
3. Sharks are generally scared away by boats, and swim groups are positioned right between the bows of a very large boat.
4. Dolphins can check their surroundings with sonar (echolocation) to 100m or more and will notice the presence of a predator even in murky water. If this happens, they will display certain agitated behaviours that we recognise, or they will disappear. If such behaviour occurs, swimmers get taken out of the water immediately.

Because of their sonar skills, when dolphins are relaxed, happy and playing with us on the bows, there is almost certainly no predator within 100m.

5. Your Dive Master has a SharkShield which strongly repels sharks if they get within 4m of it, and all guests are within that 4m radius.
6. Because of all this, being bitten by a shark is highly unlikely during a DSA swim.

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## Could the swim be cancelled?

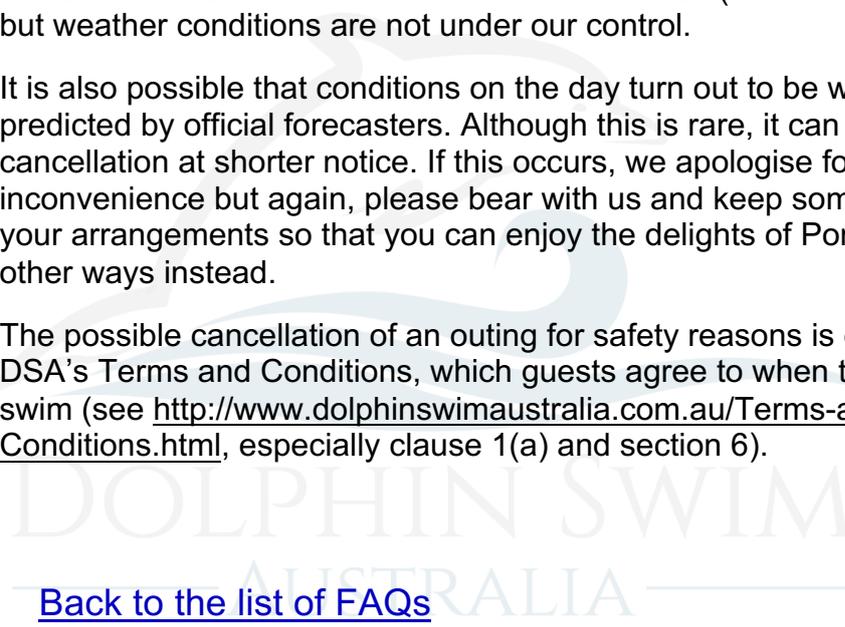
DSA always considers guest safety in deciding if an outing, or any swim on the day, should take place. The skippers and principals of DSA and *Imagine* draw on more than six decades of experience with sea conditions off Port Stephens and no accident has ever resulted from their misreading those conditions.

If rough seas and/or strong winds are predicted, then swims may be deemed unsafe and we will notify you 1-3 days before the scheduled trip. We understand that this can cause inconvenience (it does for us too!), but weather conditions are not under our control.

It is also possible that conditions on the day turn out to be worse than predicted by official forecasters. Although this is rare, it can result in cancellation at shorter notice. If this occurs, we apologise for the inconvenience but again, please bear with us and keep some flexibility in your arrangements so that you can enjoy the delights of Port Stephens in other ways instead.

The possible cancellation of an outing for safety reasons is explained in DSA's Terms and Conditions, which guests agree to when they book a swim (see <http://www.dolphinswimaustralia.com.au/Terms-and-Conditions.html>, especially clause 1(a) and section 6).

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## What if we do not find or swim with dolphins?

We have a very high success rate in finding and swimming with dolphins; on average there is a less than one in ten chance that you will not be able to complete a swim. If you do not get to have your swim, we now offer a Dolphin Guarantee: You can return for free until you get to swim with wild dolphins!

For more details on our returns and refunds policies, please see our Terms and Conditions under the 'Programs' tab.

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