

BLUESTAR DIVE BRIEFING

Welcome to Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary! Blue Star is a program recognizing dive shops that promote responsible diving and snorkeling. We hope diving with a Blue Star operator enhances your appreciation and understanding of the ecosystem.



Diving in FKNMS

- NOAA's system of national sanctuaries protect unique marine resources
- Sanctuary includes all waters surrounding the Keys, from Miami through the Dry Tortugas, from the high tide line out to 300' deep on the Atlantic side
- Created by Congress to protect North America's only living barrier coral reef

Sanctuary Zones: Are you in a special zone? What are its rules and regulations?

- FKNMS is divided into "zones" that determine what activities are, or are not, allowed
- Some zones separate different user activities, such as fishing and diving
- Other zones are for research only, or preserve large spawning and nursery areas
- Today we will/will not be diving in a special zone. We are diving in _____

The Coral Reef Ecosystem: It may look like rock, but coral is alive and delicate.

- Made up of living organisms; colonies of tiny animals which create hard exoskeletons to protect soft, anemone-like bodies.
- Home to 25 percent of all marine fish species
- Fragile and slow-growing, taking hundreds and even thousands of years to build
- Provide natural storm protection and recreational and commercial opportunities to the Florida Keys

Special Rules: Violation of these regulations can result in fines and penalties.

- DO NOT:**
- touch, injure, remove, or possess any coral, includes soft corals, sea fans (do not touch)
 - throw anything overboard (including food waste)
 - remove or alter underwater cultural resources (i.e., items from shipwrecks). Experts can learn a lot from the location and condition of underwater maritime heritage resources

Reef and Fish Etiquette: Avoid contact with the reef; do not touch or harass marine life.

- Maintain proper buoyancy through practice and proper weighting. Conduct buoyancy check before diving.
- Even a minor brush with hands or fins can damage delicate corals, or dislodge or bury other organisms.
- Avoid shallow areas and make sure no equipment is dangling or coming in contact with the reef (secure gauges, octos, cameras, etc.). Plan for surf and surge while diving!
 - Cameras are the number one distraction to even the most experienced diver, the perfect shot isn't worth permanent damage to the coral reef
- Touching, chasing, handling, feeding, cornering, or riding any marine life stresses the animal and can interrupt feeding, mating, or even provoke aggressive behavior. Observe marine life from a distance.
- Snorkelers: Stay horizontal in the water while keeping your head in the water and looking slightly forward; use snorkel vest or other floatation and lie on back looking up when necessary for rest or equipment adjustment
 - Never stand upright on the bottom! Even what looks like a bare rock could be the resting place of a newly formed coral polyp

Where Can I Learn More about Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary?

Pick up brochures located back at our shop or talk with any member of the crew.