

## Dos and don'ts of manatees

- Look at but do not touch a manatee,
- If a manatee avoids you, do not touch it.
- Do not pursue or chase a manatee while you are swimming, snorkelling, diving or operating a boat.
- Do not speed your boat over sea grass beds where manatees might be feeding.
- Never poke, prod or stab a manatee with your hands, feet or any other object.
- Do not separate a mother from her calf.
- Do not attempt to feed a manatee.
- Do not attempt to snag, hook, hold, grab, pinch or ride a manatee.

### When observing manatees follow these simple guidelines.

- When approaching a diving area where manatees might be present, cut the boat engine and paddle slowly and quietly into position.
- Slowly and gently lower the anchor. This minimizes noise and lessens disturbance of the manatees.
- Slowly enter the water to avoid excessive noise and splashing.
- Use snorkel gear only. The sound of bubbles from scuba gear may cause manatees to leave the area.
- Float on the surface of the water and observe the manatee.

As I said before, we manatees consider you (humans) friends and the only thing we are asking is that you also treat us as friends...

**TAKE CARE OF US AND WE WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.**

For additional information on the  
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# M & M A N T E E S



**Hi, My name is Michael and I'm a manatee. We manatees think we are very important to you.**

**Do you agree ? I am here to answer your questions and tell more about us manatees and how you can help save what is left of our species.**

## Hello Michael, what are manatees?

Well... manatees, often called sea cows are large, gray, oval-shaped animals with two small front flippers and a broad flat tail. Our eyes are small and pig-like and our lips are huge, soft and folded with bristles. We use our flat tails to swim gracefully and rapidly through the water. Our small front flippers, though too weak to provide support on land are used to manoeuvre and to guide food into our mouths. We can reach lengths of up to 4.2m (14 feet) and can weigh as much as 1500Kg (3,300 pounds).



## Where do you find us?

We are found throughout the Caribbean and as far north as Florida. In Jamaica, you can find us mainly along the South Coast, and if you visit Canoe Valley in Clarendon you may just see some members of my family. I know that some of you don't believe me but take a look below and you will see a recent picture of us posing gracefully. We live in extensive areas of shallow water (one or two metres deep), salt water bays, brackish estuarine areas, rivers and areas of calm waters.



## Michael... what do you eat?

Well, we manatees are called **herbivores**. We eat water plants such as **water hyacinth**, **algae**, **mangrove leaves** and **morass** weeds. Our appetites are enormous. We eat for six to eight hours each day and can consume up to 10% of our body weight in vegetation. We also require a good supply of fresh water.

## Do you care for your young and each other?

Yes we do, we manatees are mammals and as such, we give birth to live young called **calves**. Only **one** calf is born at a time and the mother suckles her calf from two nipples, which are found under each flipper. A calf is about 91.44cm (3 feet) long and weighs about 27Kg (60 pounds) at birth. It grows very rapidly and after two years, the calf is gradually weaned on to grass, but it often stays in the mother's care until the next calf is born, up to two or three years.

We manatees also live in loose herds of three or more. We swim together, communicating by nuzzling and calling each other. The herd will care for any sick or injured animal.



## Are we dangerous and do we have enemies?

No...we are not dangerous. In fact, there are reports about us saving people from drowning by pushing them up to the surface on our backs. If threatened, we will simply flee. Our gentleness makes us vulnerable and our only known enemy is you, human beings. In Jamaica, we frequently get caught in fisherman's nets and we are sometimes illegally killed for meat.

## Are manatees useful to man?

Because of our huge appetites, we have been used to keep waterways (i.e. rivers, and estuaries) free of weeds. We are also charming to watch and could be a recreational ecotourism attraction if allowed to roam unharmed, in your rivers and along the shore. However, our gentle nature and defenselessness makes us tragically vulnerable to poachers.



## Why should you protect manatees?

Sometimes people will not believe that an animal is rare until the last one has been killed. In 1983, it was found that there were less than 100 manatees left in Jamaican waters and perhaps only a total of about 1,400 manatees in the entire world. This represents a population **very close** to extinction. It is your duty to use all the means at your disposal to prevent our species from becoming extinct.

