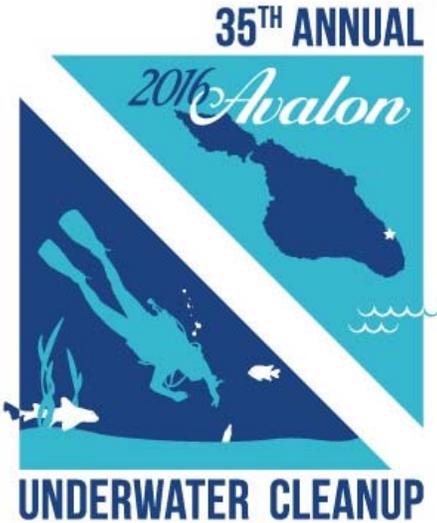


THE REEF SEEKER



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February - 2016



February's always a fun month (even more so this year with an extra day in the month) with the Super Bowl, Valentine's Day, and the Oscars all happening. But the highlight for divers has to be the annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup. This year the event is happening on Saturday, February 20.

The event usually attracts around 500 divers who get a chance to dive spots like the Green Pier (where we'll be), Lover's Cove, and Step Beach that are normally all off-limits to diving. But once a year, we get to splash in at these places and the only caveat is that you agree to hunt for and pick up trash on the bottom.

It always amazes me at what is found. And that's also why there are prizes given out for various categories like Weirdest, Small-

est, Most Unusual, and whatever else strikes the judges' fancy. (The categories are admittedly a little loosely structured.) Of course we also want to know the story behind your find and the best ones compete for the coveted Ken Kurtis Silver-Tongued Devil Award, given for the best BS story behind your find. (I can't imagine WHY they named it after me . . .)

If you'd like to join the Reef Seekers group, just give us a call at 310/652-4990. Cross our palm with \$150 and that'll cover you for the *Express* over and back, taxi to and from the dive site, your event entry, and all the fun you can handle. Don't miss out!!!



DOES YOUR PASSPORT EXPIRE IN 2016?

The advice from the State Department is that if your passport is

expiring sometime this year, renew it now. Apparently, there are a gazillion people who got passports in 2006 and 2007 and their passports expire this year. On top of that, there have been new requirements for secure driver's license and such that people use as ID that may slow the process down or encourage new applicants to get passports in addition to their driver's licenses. So in the past, where you could expect to get your passport back in a couple of weeks, it could take much longer this year. They expect the deluge to hit late spring and summer as people get ready for their annual trips. So check your passport now, see when it expires, and decide if you should renew early.

Another good reason for that (and this is something you need to be aware of in general) is that most countries now require that your passport be good for six months beyond your entry date into that country. If it's not, you might be refused boarding on the plane or - even worse - when you land they lock you up and send you home on the first available flight. So make sure you know what's what.

Also give some thought when renewing to getting the larger 52-page one instead of the standard one. There's no extra charge and, especially if you travel a lot, it'll come in handy. Just check the box.



ISLA MUJERES UPDATE

It's an embarrassment of riches this year.

As you'll recall, we had originally planned to do a week again this year in Isla Mujeres, which is just off of Cancun. The reason we do this is to swim in the middle of the largest known congregation of Whales Sharks in the world, with an estimated 400-800 animals in the area at any given time. So it's safe to say that this is a trip where we can pretty much guarantee that we'll put you nose-to-nose with the world's largest fish.

Our original dates were August 20-27. But that trip has now filled up. So we've added a second week, August 13-20. And THAT trip is almost full. So for those who have been "thinking" about it, stop thinking and start confirming.

One thing I like about this trip (which we've done twice before) is that it's good for both snorkelers who don't dive as well as divers because Mexican government regulations limit Whale Shark interaction to snorkel-only. So if you've got a non-diving spouse of S.O., this is a great trip for them.

We also do something different every day because it's not all Whale Shark, Whale Shark, Whale Shark.

Our first day is a dive day where

we'll explore some of the sculptures that make up the Cancun Underwater Museum (MUSA), all sculpted by Jason deCaires Taylor. There are many themed groups we'll point out and, since I know Jason, we'll give you some of the inside story behind things.

Our second (and fourth and sixth) days are all Whale Shark days. We'll leave around 8AM-ish and head out to the Whale Shark area, which changes day-to-day depending on where the clear fish eggs they're feeding on are drifting. It's a 60-90 minute run out but we'll have two boats just for our group, and generally eight of us on each boat. We're limited to 2 people at a time (with a guide) in the water with the WS so we rotate turns and everyone generally makes about 4 jumps over the course of the morning with each jump lasting 10-15 minutes. Come back on and rest up, have a snack, and get ready to go again when it's your turn. And those of us on the boat spot for you, so we'll let you know where they are relative to you. It's a really amazing experience.

Our third day is another adventure where we journey back over to Cancun and then down to the

Tulum area to experience diving in the cenotes, which are cave systems that have existed down there for years and years. Obviously, this will all be guided so cave-diving experience or certs are not required.

Our fifth day is either a morning or afternoon 2-tank dive exploring a medium-sized wreck off of Cancun, the C-53, and then coming back in for a reef dive. In 2014, we even saw a Loggerhead Turtle, which was a personal first for me.

On top of that, Isla Mujeres has an amazing number of very good restaurants and – except for Tuesday which is a pretty full day because of all the travel – the days are very relaxing because it's not go/go/go and there's ample time to relax, stroll around the island, or do some non-diving activities (like sip cervezas).

I'm hopefully finalizing pricing this week but I've really only got a few spots left on the August 13-20 week and I'm not taking any more on the August 20-27 (although I can put you on a waiting list if that's the only week you can do.)

Don't miss out. Call us at 310/652-4990 to reserve your spot.

2016 DIVING VACATIONS

March 11-19 • Yap

March 20-27 • Palau

June/July TBA • Bonaire

August 1-16 • Isla Guadalupe



GREAT WHITES IN AUGUST AS WELL

The Discovery Channel considers August to be Shark Week and we at Reef Seekers do as well since we've not only got our Whale Sharks at the end of the month but we're going to start with Great Whites at the beginning of the month.

This will also be cage diving from the spacious and luxurious *Nautilus Belle Amie*, which is perfectly suited for this trip, with five cages that run all day long. You'll have ample opportunity to go nose-to-nose with nature's ultimate apex predator. If you're a photog, you'll have ample excellent photo opportunities. And if you're just a gawker, we'll make sure the reg doesn't fall out of your mouth when your jaw drops in amazement.

We've only got 5 spots available on this trip as of this writing, all in deluxe (standard) staterooms, two to a room. If you're interested in single occupancy or a master stateroom (obviously both at an extra charge) that can likely be arranged.

We did this trip twice in 2015 and had a blast both times with plenty of sharks and plenty of close passes. We expect 2016 to be no different. Come on and join us!!!



UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES

Avalon Underwater Cleanup

• • • February 20 • • •

Aquarium of the Pacific - Diver's Day

• • • March 12 • • •

Chamber Day & Eve

• • • May 4 • • •

BONAIRE IN AUGUST OR JULY

At the risk of making this the all-travel newsletter . . .

We're also thinking of Bonaire in late June or early July. We've got a small core of people already interested and will consult with them on preferred dates but if Bonaire's something that's on your radar, let us know of your interest.

Among the great things about Bonaire are that (1) It's fairly easy to get to, (2) The diving's really good and reliable, (3) Buddy Dive – where we stay – is fabulous, and (4) A good time is had by all. In fact, of all of our regular destinations, Bonaire probably has the highest percentage of repeat divers, in other words, people who have gone there before. (And they wouldn't do that if it wasn't good.)

So, if Bonaire might be of interest to you, give us a call at 310/652-4990 and let us know what time frame works best for you.

NEW WAYS TO PAY

I know it seems like we're always looking for new ways to take your money but this one's not about getting MORE of your money, but

in making EASIER for you to pay what you owe.

We have now started accepting Apple Pay and Android Pay for our service/repairs. When you go over to see repair guru Robert Stark, you can pay through our wireless reader that accepts both of these electronic fund transfer methods. Just give a swipe and you're good to go.

Both systems work essentially the same, just one is keyed to Apple devices and the other to Android-based ones. You load your credit card into the device through a special app and then the device essentially becomes your wallet. The methodology may differ a bit but basically when you're ready to pay, you open the app, you choose the credit card you want it billed to, you hold your device close to the reader, and it all goes securely through.

So the next time you're picking up your repair from Robert, if you're equipped to use either method, let 'er rip!!!



D.A.N. FATALITIES REPORT

After an absence of a few years, D.A.N. has again published an annual diving fatalities report, this one covering 2010-2013 fatalities. I think you all know I find this stuff interesting and illuminating, so I got a hard copy. (It's also downloadable on the D.A.N. website as a PDF and is free.) Some interesting random take-aways:

- There were 334 deaths (US or Canadians) reported during this 4-year period
- Average is 83/year (and has been at that level for a few years)
- Florida & California account for the highest number of fatalities but also have the most diving

- 82% of the victims were male
- 58% of the victims were 50 or older (sort of in-line with an aging diver population)
- 82% of the victims were classified as over-weight or obese based on BMI
- Underlying health problems and running out of air were the #1 and #2 fatality triggers
- 6% (19) of the fatalities were on rebreathers
- 59% of the incidents tracked (fatal & non-fatal) occurred on the first dive of the day

I encourage you to think about which of the things listed above might apply to you. Just from the list above, if you are a male, older than 50, overweight, and doing your first dive of the day, maybe you'd like to be a bit extra cau-

tious. (It also underscores why so many dive operators on multi-day trips make that first checkout dive an "easy" one). But I also encourage you to read the full report and see what you can come away with to help you improve your own diving practices. There's valuable info for everyone.



PICTURE PAGE - Cleanups past

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2016)



**Treasure
from the sea**



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**Waiting
for the starting horn**



**Relaxed
entry technique**



**Help
with the heavy stuff**



**Sorting through
the goodies**