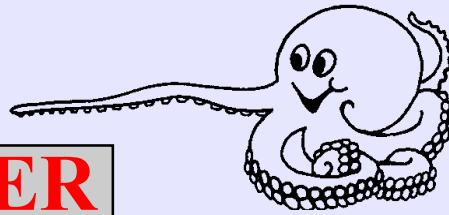


THE REEF SEEKER



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February - 2023



41st ANNUAL AVALON UNDERWATER CLEANUP IS FEBRUARY 25

We hope you'll be able to join us for this annual event that benefits the City of Avalon as well as the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber. Official organizers this year are Catalina Divers Supply and the Avalon Rotary Club Foundation. Net proceeds from the event will benefit both the Chamber and the Rotary Foundation, who will be using their portion to help with the Casino Point dive park improvement project.

Some things to know:

- The dive portion of the event is 9:30-11:00AM (with a mandatory dive briefing at 9:00AM).
- The awards ceremony runs from 1:00-3:00PM
- If you're going over just for the day (as most people do), there are two Catalina Express boat options out of Long Beach, either at 6:00AM or 7:00AM (which was just added). Both will get you to Avalon time.
- If you haven't already signed up, registration is \$55/diver. (There's also a non-diver rate available.)
- Be aware that a booking fee is added to each registration.
- When you register, choose your group (if you're with one) and the site you want to dive.
- The sign-up website is www.avalonharborcleanup.org which will then take you to the sign-up page.
- Registration closes February 17 (but you can sign up day-of as well, although we don't recommend that)
- There are still some spots available if you want to volunteer to work the event and those are listed on the same website under VOLUNTEER.
- Over 300 divers have signed up so far and we've got room for more.

For all kinds of reasons this is a big event and a great way for you to help out the City of Avalon as well as the diving community as a whole. Hope to see you there.



GUADALUPE ISLAND MAY BE CLOSED TO DIVERS

We mentioned this in TWARS earlier this week but thought we'd expand on it here.

Isla Guadalupe, which is roughly 200 miles SW of Ensenada and is home to a large population of Great White Sharks, is being closed to divers by the Mexican government. This is the area where we've run four different trips so that you can observe – from the safety of a submerged cage - the Great Whites in their natural environment.

The closure affects both recreational divers and scientists who come to study the sharks. The ostensible reason given is that this is to protect the sharks because there have been some incidents with tourist/recreational boats over the years. Perhaps the most dramatic was when a shark rammed a cage on the *Solmar* a few years ago, got stuck inside, and then leapt out of the top of the cage. It was all caught on video and was quite amazing to see. But you could also see that the shark was injured during the incident, because you could see blood around the gills.

Obviously, this closure will have a tremendous economic impact on the dozen or so boats that have been going there. The season runs July-November so this makes up a large chunk of the annual revenues

for some operations. It's estimated that the overall market is \$25 million. Already one boat, *Horizon* out of San Diego, says the combination of the loss of revenue during the pandemic and now the loss of Guadalupe is forcing them to sell their boat and go out of business.

Mike Lever, owner of Nautilus Dive Adventures (full disclosure – we deal with them a lot and have a good relationship with Mike) has vowed to mount a legal challenge in Mexican courts to get this closure over-turned. Mike's thought, and I happen to agree with this, is that this move is counter-intuitive.

He points out that, due to the isolation of Guadalupe, the Mexican government really can't patrol the area very effectively. But with all of the recreational dive boats out there throughout the season, those boats effectively act as guardians of Guadalupe because they can radio in any suspicious activity. But without that presence, it opens the possibility that illegal fishing can then move in, and there will be no one around to report them to authorities to stop what's going on. This would make the sharks more vulnerable, not safer.

So there are definitely aspects of this that don't make sense and even seem suspicious. The person who authorized the closure, illegally according to Mike, resigned his position the following day. But the closure stayed in effect. What the future of this holds is anyone's guess but we'll try to keep you posted. We made trips out there in 2015, 2016, and 2017 and it really is quite a unique diving experience that I feel can be done without posing any harm to the sharks and which hopefully will be resumed in the near future.

GREAT WEBSITE

One thing that easily screws up any dive trip is wind, because wind generates waves and waves (or swell) definitely puts a damper on things like diving. So check out www.windy.com. It's a great resource to have when you're traveling as it monitors winds all over the world. It can give you local temps and other info as well. Just zoom into the area when you'll be diving. It's a very handy resource to have when planning a trip or when you're in the middle of one.

2023 DIVING VACATIONS

Feb. 6-10 • San Ignacio

July 10-23 & 21 - Aug 2 • Yap

August 19-26 • Isla Mujeres

November 15-29 • Maldives



WANNA SEE A WHALE SHARK?

Would you like to see a dozen of them? In one place? At one time? Then Isla Mujeres is the place for you.

We are hoping to go back to Isla August 19-26 this year. (We haven't been since 2016 so it's high time.) This is a trip we generally want to keep relatively small (8-10 people) and we've already got a few interested.

In case you're not aware of Isla Mujeres, it's a relatively small island that lies a few miles north of Cancun. And its size really is part of its charm, although it's got all the amenities you could ask for, including some really good restaurants, but without the crowds like you'd find in Cancun.

Best of all, Isla is home to what is believed to be the world's largest aggregation of Whale Sharks with as many as 800 individuals in the area. They tend to congregate in an area of the ocean about 10 miles or so north of Isla, so it's roughly a one-hour boat ride to get out to the area where they hang out and feed on clear fish eggs near the surface of what are usually very clear waters. The area where these fish are moves a little bit daily and it covers quite an expanse of ocean so even though there will be other boats out there, there's generally room for everyone and you can definitely find yourself in the ocean

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	Feb. 1	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	35
Sat.	18	Redondo/Vets	Navigation Made Easy	35
Thu.	23	Redondo/Vets	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Wed.	Mar. 1	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox Diver ---	95
Wed.	8	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	175
Sat.	18	Redondo/Vets	Taming Surf Entries	35
Thu.	23	Redondo/Vets	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Wed.	Apr. 5	--- CLASS ---	--- Tables & Computers ---	35

enjoying your own personal Whale Shark.

We usually do three different days with forays out to the Whale Shark area. (And be aware that the Mexican government has a snorkeling-only rule for interacting with these leviathans.) On two of the other days, we'll do some local dives around Isla including a visit to the Cancun Underwater Museum, which is a collection of themed underwater sculptures created by artist Jason deCaries Taylor and which are quite unique.

The other dive day involves a trek back over to Cancun and then a drive down to Tulum so we can dive one of the famous cenotes. These are fresh-water cave dives led by experienced and qualified cave guides and are truly a unique experience. (You don't have to be cave-certified to do these dives.)

The really nice thing about all of this is that you're doing something different each day. There's also plenty of time to chill out on the beach (the hotel we stay at has their own) because we're usually back from the Whale Shark encounters by 3PM and the dive days are generally half days (2 dives) so we either do the morning or the afternoon.

You can go to our website (www.reefseekers.com) and click on FOREIGN TRIP REPORTS or

choose PICTURE PAGES to see what the fuss is all about. And once you decide, "This is a trip for me," give us a call at 310/652-4990 and we'll give you all the particulars and get you signed up.

Your Whale Shark is waiting.



BONAIRE - SOLD OUT

Something we pride ourselves on is keeping our groups small so we can give you some personalized attention during the trip. (The joke is that for an extra \$500, we'll leave you alone.) Our group sizes are anywhere from 6-16. I have never understood why some places want to take 40 people nor why anyone would sign up for such a large group

Using that as prologue, our Bonaire trip (capped at 12) is sold out. We've got room for on our Yap weeks in July, and we've got 3 spots left on our Maldives trip in November. Always remember that when you choose to travel with Reef Seekers, you're going to get a hassle-free memorable trip and you won't get lost in the crowd.



SQUID MAY BE BACK

There have been reports of scattered sightings of both eggs and live squid at Veterans Park lately. So it may mean that the squid run will be starting soon. Generally, we think this happens from mid-December to the end of March but it's not like the squid have agreed to a timetable. In fact one year, we have a phenomenal run during August.

But going out to see the squid and the eggs has become a prominent

attraction of a night dive at Vets Park. In reality, you can see the squid eggs both day and night. (In fact, they're probably easier to find during the day, especially if the egg clusters are scattered.) But the only time you can see live squid, let alone mating ones, is at night. Nighttime is when they mate, the female plants the eggs in a cluster, and then they both go off to die, because they're at the end of their life cycle.

While this sounds somewhat tragic, it's not only literally the circle of life, but it also means that you'll find other animals drawn to the area to feast on the dying squid. We've seen sea lions, crabs, other fish, and even the occasional shark coming in. And when you take a broader view of things, what we

see as divers really does tend to underscore how things in nature are connected. One thing affects another and so on and so forth.

Although we haven't gone out this season for various reasons, we've got two more squid dives on the calendar, February 23 and March 23. We'll do our best to make those happen, even if there's only one person interested. So if you'd like to join us for those, just give us a call at 310/652-4990 or shoot us an e-mail and we'll put you on the list.

The annual squid runs are truly a sight to behold, especially if you luck out and hit it on a really active night. We're very fortunate to have such a special experience happening literally right in our own (off-shore) backyard.

PICTURE PAGE - Guadalupe encounters

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2023)



Getting in the mood for sharks



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



The view from inside the cage



Yes, they come very close



Watching the parade



Ultimate apex predator