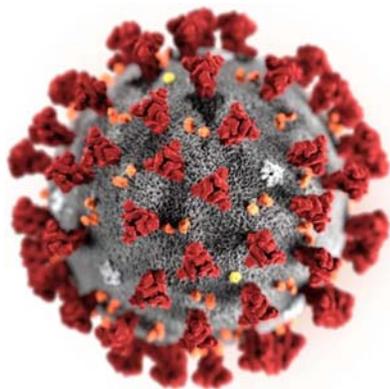


# THE REEF SEEKER



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July - 2020



## **JULY COVID UPDATE**

Talk about feeling like you're trapped in a real-life version of Alice-in-Wonderland.

To say it's a fluid situation locally (and by that, I mean Southern California) would be an understatement. Los Angeles especially still seems to be a hotspot and the state of California overall seems to have back-slid a bit from where we were a month ago. As such, we now have a mandatory face-covering order from the state, and L.A. County has closed all the beaches and bike paths for the upcoming July 4th holiday.

Part of this, while it may seem like an abundance of caution, stems from Memorial Day. Through contact tracing it seems now that a lot of the surge and resurgence we're seeing is from people who, relieved not to be cooped up anymore at the last holiday, threw caution to the wind (along with face masks, social distancing, and hand-washing)

and went out and whooped it up.

The virus can incubate for as much as two weeks and then, as symptoms appear, it can be another two weeks before you're sick enough to need to go see a doctor or be hospitalized. That's why when you hear of an outbreak – not just here but anywhere around the world – you generally go back roughly 3 to 4 weeks to see what was happening and determine the likely culprit.

There also seems in the last few days to be a renewed interest in what they're calling "superspreader" events. These are usually large or prolonged gatherings of people where only a few in the crowd are sick and shedding virus, but because of tight quarters, prolonged exposure, people talking loudly because of increased background noise (which spreads infected droplets further), lack of mask-wearing, and other factors, sometimes hundreds of people in attendance get infected. Then they go home and infect others who live with them. So the cycle continues. Typical superspreader locations are churches, bars, beaches (even though they're outside), restaurants, and other similar places.

This is the rationale behind closing all the bars in L.A. County again as well as the holiday weekend beach closures. From a diving standpoint, it's also why you'd

likely want to be cautious if you're on a boat in an enclosed space like a galley or a bunkroom.

Mask-wearing certainly helps mitigate all of this. I think this concept is important enough that I've borrowed a chart from Community Medical Center in Fresno that gives you a pretty good idea of the various risks of infection with mask vs. no-mask combinations. You'll find it's the bottom half of the last page of this newsletter (instead of the Picture Page – although it IS a picture).

It's hard to know, at this point, which way we're heading in California. This coming holiday weekend will make a big difference. The numbers government officials look at typically are rates of positive testing (which has been going up), hospitalizations (Riverside County reports they are at 99% ICU-bed capacity as of June 29), and deaths. As of June 30, L.A. County has 3,326 deaths which accounts for 55% of the statewide total. Add in Riverside, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties, and that's another 1,504 deaths. (Santa Barbara & Ventura counties have fairly low numbers.) So Southern California as a whole accounts for over 80% of the statewide deaths. For that perspective, it's easy to see why seemingly-Draconian measures are being imple-

mented and a slowing down of the reopening is taking place.

For now, most of the local boats are running, though perhaps a bit sporadically. Some are going out mid-week as well as weekends. You'll need to check with each of them about their individual protocols regarding COVID and decide if you're comfortable with whatever policies that have (or don't have) in place.

Unfortunately, COVID isn't graded on a curve. It's pass/fail. You either have it or you don't. And if you find suddenly you have it, you can't just get rid of it. It's going to have to run its course, whatever that may be.

I have a friend in Florida who is on the tail end of his bout with COVID. He thinks he got it during dinner with a friend and that the friend got it from having spent a number of days at a re-opened gym. (Gyms are certainly considered high-risk places in terms of potentially getting a COVID infection.) He survived and didn't give it to his wife or child but in his own words, "It really sucks." So you'd definitely rather NOT get that it rather than have to tough it out. The other thing to remember is that it's not just YOU you're trying to protect, but those around you as well - like your parents, grandparents, or other relatives - whom you might inadvertently infect.

With that as prologue (admittedly a very long prologue - but no one accuses me of brevity) here's how it breaks down locally and internationally.



## LOCAL OPTIONS

**BEACHES** - They're closed for the holiday weekend in L.A. County. Orange, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura County beaches are all open, at least for the moment. The L.A. County closures start on Friday (I can't find a specific time) and go through Monday. So basically, no L.A. County beach dives until Tuesday. Also be aware that the law defines the "beach" as extending out 1,000 feet from the tide line. So if you pull up to a beach site in a boat, you might be ordered to leave as you'll likely be in violation of the closure based on your distance offshore.

**AVALON** - The big question is: Does the Avalon Underwater Park count as a beach? The Avalon City Council debated the issue Tuesday and has found a way to classify the Park as not-a-beach and therefore exempt from the closure order. In other words, the Park will be open this weekend. (It had something to do with accessing the water via stairs.

But whatever works.) Please remember that Catalina Divers Supply still would like you to reserve rentals and even airfills ahead of time. Call them at 310/510-0330. And although they're no longer doing the rubber-mat gear assembly area (which was actually a very nice idea), you can rent an individual mat for \$5. Reserve those ahead of time too. Also bear in mind that all the bars in Avalon, unless they're serving you food as well, will be closed. So no post-dive visit to Luau Larry's or to the Marlin Club.

**DIVE BOATS** - All running. Check with the boats directly or the charter group for destination and availability. Although some of the boats would do July 4th trips and end with a fireworks show, it seems most public fireworks displays have been cancelled, so don't count on that. And, as I mentioned previously, be sure to check with the boat &/or the charterer to find out what their COVID mitigation protocols are (including how many people they'll be taking) to see if those fit within your own personal comfort zone.

And obviously, while everything I've said above is correct as of Tuesday evening, it can change.

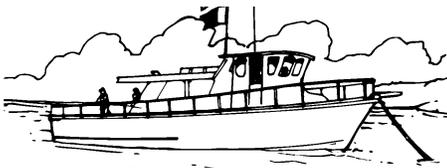
## 2020-21 DIVING VACATIONS (maybe)

**Aug. 28 - Sept. 5 • Bonaire**

**October 17-29 • Indonesia**

**January 13-22 • Socorro**

**Where else shall we go???**



## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

One word to describe this: Messy.

On Tuesday (June 30), the European Union released their list of “safe” countries and the United States isn’t on it (which really isn’t surprising at all). While the list is not binding on member nations, it’s presumed they will all follow it. There’s also an assumption that many other countries will use the EU list as a guideline for who they want to let across their borders as well.

It’s perfectly understandable since if you’ve gotten your COVID rate down low or even to zero (like New Zealand) or perhaps you never had COVID in your country at all (Federated States of Micronesia and Yap), the last thing you want is for some asymptomatic person to fly in and then start spreading what you’ve worked your tail off to eradicate or avoid. I mean, that’s how this whole thing started in the first place, with infected people traveling to various parts of the world and re-infecting people there, who then spread it even further.

Some countries are allowing travelers in but will mandate a 14-day self-quarantine period once you arrive. Others have said that if you have a negative COVID test within 3-10 days before your departure, bring proof of that and they’ll let you in. One country (and I can’t remember who at the moment) even says that they’ll set up a COVID testing site at their airport and test you upon arrival. If you’re nega-

## UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	July 8	- CLASS -	- NAUI NITROX -	<b>\$75</b>
Sat.	18	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Thu.	Aug. 13	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	<b>\$25</b>
Sat.	22	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Wed.	26	- CLASS -	- FISH ID -	<b>\$25</b>
Sat.	Sept. 5	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	<b>\$25</b>
Sun.	20	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Thu.	24	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	<b>\$25</b>

tive, welcome. If you’re positive, go home.

A few countries are opening their borders starting in July, but some cautiously so. The Maldives, for instance, will open for tourists visiting liveaboards, resorts and hotels on uninhabited islands as of July 15. Guest houses and hotels on inhabited islands will re-open on August 1. And while there are no restrictions once admitted to the Maldives, you will have to submit a health questionnaire that says you don’t have any symptoms and you’ll undergo a thermal check at the airport. If everything is hunky-dory, you’re good to go.

Obviously, these are all things that could be changing as circumstances dictate. If some countries see sudden spikes in cases as they reopen, they’ll likely pause and other countries may delay their reopening too. On the other hand, success will breed success.

The frustrating part of all of this, both domestically and internationally, is that it’s all totally up to us. If everyone religiously follows mask and distancing protocols, and regularly washes and disinfects their hands, we can wipe this thing out. But it only takes a small subset of people going “I don’t wanna!!!” to make the whole process come crashing down and to continually give the virus a new lease on life.

## OUR TRIPS

**BONAIRE** – We’re scheduled to leave August 28. Bonaire is still not open to Americans. Buddy Dive is starting to re-open but it will probably take them a while to get up to speed. We’ll decide by August 1, and maybe by July 15. One fallback is simply to push the trip back to 2021, probably in May.

**INDONESIA** – Scheduled for October 17-29. Murex Resort is closed, having furloughed most of their staff. Bali seems to be recovering quickly but we’re not sure about Sulawesi. There are also questions about the accuracy of the numbers from Indonesia. So we’re in a wait-and-see mode with this one because it also involves flying through Singapore, Taiwan, or Korea, so those countries also have to be willing to accept Americans, at least on a transit basis.

**SOCORRO** – This one is scheduled for January 13-22. We hope that by then, all of the COVID issues will have calmed down if not be under better control. So we’re quite hopeful about this one coming off without a hitch and we still have a couple of spots available for anyone interested. (We’ll be on the Nautilus Under Sea.)

As with everything else, these plans could all change but that’s where we are at the moment.



## CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS

I have confirmed this with a friend who works there so I believe this to be 100% true.

Catalina Express has a policy that you will wear a mask/face-cover-

ing all the time while you're on their vessels. On a recent trip, somewhere around mid-channel, there was apparently some guy who decided he was done wearing his mask and took it off. A crew member approached him and gently asked him to put it back on. He refused. Another crew member asked a second time. He refused a second time.

Shortly after that, the engines pulled back and stopped. The boat was dead in the water. The captain came on the loudspeaker and announced that the boat wasn't going anywhere until all passengers

were again wearing masks. Apparently, the guy still wouldn't put his mask back on. The boat continued to sit.

After twenty minutes of this (and I would assume some irate passengers applying peer pressure), the guy put his mask back on and the trip resumed. Kudos to the captain. (Apparently, this has happened a couple of times.)

Personally, I would have given him the choice of putting his mask back on or getting off the boat. The fact that the Express was mid-channel makes that option only that much more satisfying.



## Levels of Exposure Keeping Yourself and Others Safe

