

THE REEF SEEKER



REEF SEEKERS DIVE CO.
P.O. Box 634
Beverly Hills, CA 90213
Phone & text: (310) 652-4990
web: www.reefseekers.com
e-mail: kenkurtis@aol.com

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MASKS vs. MASKS

So often during all of this COVID stuff we've been enduring, anytime I hear someone talking about masks, my first thought is diving face masks over our eyes, not face-coverings over our nose and mouths. But for the purpose of this article, "mask" means the COVID type, not the diving type.

With the rise of the Delta-variant, and especially if you're still unvaccinated, masks could literally be the difference between life and death. The Delta version is supposed to be twice as infectious as the original strain, and it is thought to perhaps be more deadly (although there's not enough data to reach that conclusion yet). But the point is that it's nasty and you don't want to get it.

On June 28, L.A. County Public Health issued a recommendation (not a mandate) that everyone, regardless of vaccination status, resume wearing a mask indoors when in a public place where you don't know the vaccination status of others around you. COVID cases are starting to creep back up and hopefully this stays as only a strong recommendation and doesn't become a requirement. (But also realize that under the rules, businesses are allowed to adopt MORE stringent rules than what the pub-

lic health orders are.)

It's also important to understand that there are different entities issuing mandates and orders and advice, and they're not always in sync with one another. First you have the CDC issuing national guidance. Then you may have a state public health department issuing guidelines for your state. Then would come county rules followed by city rules. The whole thing flows downward and the gist of it all seems to be that as you move down the food chain, the lower entities can require MORE stringent guidelines, but not LESS than what's come down from above.

But lost in this shuffle is Presidential Executive Order #13998.

That order requires that masks be worn "on all public maritime vessels, including ferries" And then it adds the word "commercial" a little later on which, for our purposes, includes the *Catalina Express* and all dive boats. (Whether the various operators choose to comply with the mask order is a separate animal.) Specifically:

Vessels (Conveyances): Vessel operators must use best efforts to ensure that any person on the conveyance wears a mask when boarding, disembarking, and for the duration of travel. Depending on the circumstances, best efforts include

the following efforts:

- boarding only those persons who wear masks;
- instructing persons that Federal law requires wearing a mask on the conveyance and failure to comply constitutes a violation of Federal law;
- monitoring persons on board the conveyance for anyone who is not wearing a mask and seeking compliance from such persons;
- at the earliest opportunity, disembarking any person who refuses to comply;
- providing persons with prominent and adequate notice to facilitate awareness and compliance of the requirement of this Order to wear a mask; best practices may include, if feasible, advanced notifications on digital platforms, such as on apps, websites, or email; posted signage in multiple languages with illustrations; printing the requirement on transit tickets; or other methods as appropriate.

The point of my mentioning this is not to argue for or against mask adherence but simply to point out that while you may think you know the rules and guidelines for mask-wearing, once you set foot on a commercial maritime vessel, they're operating under a different set of rules. The Executive order remains in effect until the COVID public health emergency is declared as over.



AVALON DAY TRIPS THIS SUMMER

We're back into the swing of things with our monthly single-day trips over to Avalon to dive the Underwater Park. This is an especially good choice for anyone making their first foray back into the water after a COVID-induced hiatus.

A big advantage of the Park is that, because it's land-based instead of boat-based, you can tailor the schedule to fit your own particular needs, even if you're with a larger group. Let's say everyone's going in on the first dive and as you enter, you just don't quite feel right. So you quite smartly abort the dive for now. But that doesn't mean you've messed up the entire day.

When I take groups over, I act as a semi-instructor. Everyone's certified but I'm also there to help solve any problems. So in the above-mentioned scenario, I'd have escorted you back to the stairs and told you to wait until we got back, and then I could go back in with just you alone as everyone else began their surface interval and got airfills. Now you've had a successful dive and you're back on track. That kind of improvising the dive schedule is much harder to do on a boat, where gate and be-back times might be more rigid.

We generally like to leave from the San Pedro Express terminal. A

big reason for this is that the parking is (IMHO) a lot easier than in Long Beach. It's also a more civilized departure time, usually somewhere between 7AM and 9AM depending on time of the year, with a return from Avalon anywhere from 4-6PM. So we eliminate the O'Dark Thirty wake-up calls (which I personally am not fond of).

The way we set it up is that you provide all the gear with the exception of a tank. We take care of the rest. Right now the fee is \$160, which covers round-trip transport on *Catalina Express*, taxi to and from the Park, AL80 tank rental and two airfills for the dives, and escort service by me, Reef Seekers owner Ken Kurtis (a long-time NAUI instructor). We usually get in three dives, ranging anywhere from 20-60 minutes each, depending on everyone's cold tolerance and air consumption, and we usually take an informal lunch break between the first and second dives (bring your own food).

Catalina's also planning some nice improvements for the Park area. They just opened up the new bathrooms on the fuel dock (in addition to the Porta-Potties at the

Park), and there's also a little snack stand in that building as well. They intend to re-build the restaurant there but that likely won't be before summer ends. And there are some larger-scale plans that include re-doing the pavement area, more benches, more bathrooms, showers, maybe a second set of stairs, and just generally making it a nicer place to visit. But those improvements will likely take place over the fall and winter.

Catalina Divers Supply is moving their Park location and consolidating everything into a new space on the ground floor of the Casino, about halfway between the portapotties and the fuel dock. This is a work-in-progress and they hope to be ready-to-go at the end of the summer. The new space will be a full-service retail operation as well as a rental facility (the Catalina Street location that was formerly Scuba Luv will close, but the location out on the Green Pleasure Pier will remain). They will also run air lines from the Casino location out to a new airfill station that will be located between where the portapotties are and where the airfill truck is now. (The truck will also go away once the new Casino location is ready to go.) It all sounds

2021 DIVING VACATIONS

March 11-20 • Socorro

May 20-28 • Bonaire

July (??) • Indonesia

Fall (??) • Yap

(Avalon Park - continued)
very exciting and promising.

Specifically for us, our next trip to Avalon will be on Friday, July 9. (We usually go on Wednesday to avoid the weekend crowds but I have a schedule conflict in July.) We're leaving on the 8:00AM San Pedro boat and returning on the 5:15PM out of Avalon. As I mentioned previously, \$160 gets you covered. Slight extra charge for nitrox or a larger tank. Give us a call at 310/652-4990 if you want to join us but keep the Park in mind as a great way to reintroduce yourself to the ocean and to have a good time.



ZOOM SEEKERS IN JULY

Make plans to join us via Zoom on Tuesday, July 13, starting at 7:30PM PDT, for our monthly Zoom Seekers meeting. Our speaker this month will be Bill Macdonald who's had an amazing and long career in the diving industry. He was a member of the Cousteau dive & film team for five years, spent some time as a sales rep for U.S. Divers (now Aqualung), and has been diving all over the world. He also won a NOGI award for environment

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	July 1	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Fri.	9	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$160
Sat.	24	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single dive)	\$25
Wed.	28	--- CLASS ---	PHOTO WORKSHOP	\$25
Thu.	Aug. 12	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Wed.	18	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$160
Sat.	28	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single dive)	\$25
Wed.	Sept. 1	--- CLASS ---	FISH ID	\$25

(diving's equivalent of an Oscar) in 2013.

But his passion is film that can tell a story about the ocean we all love so much. This resulted in creating the film "Synthetic Sea," which focuses on the enormous amounts of debris accumulating in the ocean. He and his late wife Susan also produced the "Secrets of California Waters," revealing many ocean secrets during rare encounters with aquatic life such as elephant seal harems and basking sharks. Other film titles include "Manta Man," featuring Bill Acker and the mantas of Yap, and "Breath Hold" which deals with diving with Tiger Sharks. Bill has also been pioneering 360° video, employing six GoPro cameras in an interactive video format.

His talk is titled "THE EVOLUTION OF UNDERWATER FILM-MAKING," and Bill will talk about how undersea film-making has evolved over the years, from 16mm film in bulky housing to things as small nowadays as a GoPro. He'll also cover various video formats, from MP4 all the way to 360° virtual-reality creations.

I'll send out the Zoom link in TWARS on July 11. (Each Zoom talk has a unique link so previous Zoom Seekers links won't work.) Hope you'll be able to join us on July 13 for this wonderful journey into Bill's underwater world.

COVID INSURANCE

Although I don't know specifically of any dive travel/tour companies contemplating this, I thought you ought to be aware of it in case anyone gets any bright ideas.

Royal Caribbean International said earlier this week that it would require unvaccinated guests over the age of twelve who are embarking from a port in Florida to show proof of insurance that covers COVID-19 related medical expenses, quarantine, and evacuation. What will be interesting about this is that Florida enacted a law prohibiting companies from asking for proof of vaccine. But the federal government requires cruises ships to certify that a majority of passengers and crew are vaccinated before they leave port. It sounds like Royal Caribbean is trying this as a work-around.

If you should ever get some sort of proof-of-insurance request – within diving or outside of it – don't just assume your policy will cover you fully or perhaps ever at all. Some policies have COVID-specific exclusions written in or define a pandemic to be an "act of God" from which they claim exemption of coverage.

So, as the saying goes, "Know before you go."



SHARK BITES KID AT CATALINA

On Wednesday morning, a kid and his father, as part of a Boy Scout camp outing, were kayaking at Parsons Landing (just around the corner from Arrow Point on the West End) when something bumped their kayak. The kid then put his hand into the water for reasons unknown and the bumper – which was some sort of unidentified shark – bit into the boy’s

hand. The kid was airlifted to UCLA for surgery – the injury was not life-threatening – but the waters around Parsons have been closed for at least 24 hours as a precaution.

Of course, my first thought was, “Why are you sticking your hand in the water?” My second thought was that this is not “Shark & Order” and if you say, “Close down the area for a mile in each direction. No sharks in or out,” that really doesn’t really work.

I’m presuming the closure order will be lifted in time for the weekend since the closed area would likely encompass a number of West End diving spots. So hopefully this will not impact any holiday weekend diving if that’s the area you planned to go.

HAVE A SAFE 4th OF JULY

If you’re going to be out on a private boat, and even if you’ll be diving from a commercial boat, remember that this holiday weekend is frequently one of the heaviest in terms of private boat traffic and a lot of the people at the helm of these boats have been drinking. So be extra-cautious when diving this weekend, especially at Catalina. Before you surface, not only take a good look around, but give a good listen as well. If in doubt, stay submerged for a few more minutes until that doubt (or an approaching boat) passes.

But whether you’re diving or not, from beach or from boat, or even not diving at all, have a happy, fun, and safe Fourth!!!

PICTURE PAGE - Red, White, & Blue fish

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2021)



***Pacific
Creolefish***



P.O. Box 634
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



***Easter Island
Damselfish (endemic)***



***Bearded
Scorpionfish***



***Warty
Frogfish***



***Red-Toothed
Triggerfish***