

THE REEF SEEKER



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THE STATE OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

One word: Sad.

There are about 20 countries worldwide open to American tourists. Here's a list of those where there's diving to be had: Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas (with restrictions), Barbados, Belize (August 15), Bermuda, Dominica (August 7), Dominican Republic, French Polynesia, Jamaica, Maldives, Mexico, St. Barts, St. Lucia, St. Maarten, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, Turks and Caicos, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Bear in mind that some of these countries may also have pre-arrival testing requirements and just about all of them have a health questionnaire prior to being admitted to the country that simply says you're asymptomatic &/or haven't been around a COVID-infected person in the last 14 days. Some may institute a quarantine once you arrive, which puts a major crimp in any vacation time. And obviously, things can change between my typing this and you actually trying to go somewhere.

One of the biggest fears any of these places have is that if they've successfully held back COVID

infections, they're going to inadvertently let in asymptomatic tourists who then infect people and they're back to square one. So it's a delicate balancing act between not wanting COVID to spread and needing the influx of American tourist dollars. And with the US remaining the #1 hotspot in the world, we're not quite as welcome all over the globe as we used to be.

The other thing to take into consideration would be how you're getting to wherever it is you're going. Is it a short plane ride (for instance 2+ hours to get down to Cabo) or something more intricate (24 hours and 2-3 plane rides to get to the Maldives)? How is your airline carrier dealing with social distancing, if at all? Are middle seats or alternate rows left empty? Any other requirements/restrictions during travel? All important.

Find out what the procedures are once you reach your destination. How are they dealing with sanitizing rooms if you're in a hotel? Are there limitations on how many divers they take out on their boats? Do they have accommodations set aside in case someone comes down with something during the trip and needs to be observed/isolated?

If you're doing a liveaboard, ask all of those questions. For good and for bad, a liveaboard is a contained ecosystem. In other words,

once you're on board – assuming you don't do any island stops or stuff like that – you're pretty much self-contained. If you could assure yourself that everyone on board, including the crew, is COVID-free, you could relax restrictions since you can't get infected from someone who isn't infected (as opposed to infected but asymptomatic).

There are rapid-result tests available where you can get COVID results in 15-60 minutes. What a game-changer it would be if, as part of the boarding process, everyone was tested and hopefully found to be negative. Because when you have everyone on board (maybe even test everyone again three days out), it's the same as pre-COVID days when there was no infection to spread around, and you wouldn't have to worry about any masks except the ones you'd need underwater. Perhaps a pipe dream but by the same token, any forward-thinking liveaboard operation who could implement this would have IMHO a great marketing angle.

As you well know, this is all an evolving, and sometimes rapidly so, situation. It certainly looks like it's going to be with us for some time and on top of that, in another couple of months we'll be entering cold/flu season. Yikes!!! Be safe, be cautious, and above all, stay COVID-free.



REEF SEEKERS TRAVEL PLANS

With the caveat that everything is tentatively planned in this post-COVID environment . . .

ISLA MUJERES (August 1) – Cancelled. We’ll try again next year. It’s a really great experience diving with all the Whale Sharks and definitely should be a bucket-list trip for you. The other thing I like about this trip is that every day we’re doing something different from the previous day.

BONAIRE (August 28) – Originally scheduled for May and then moved to late August, we moved it again to May 29 – June 5, 2021. The biggest problem is that we can’t get there even if we wanted to. Bonaire has not yet announced when they would re-open to Americans but American & United don’t have flights scheduled again until mid-September and Delta doesn’t have a Bonaire flight on their sked until mid-November. That being said, it’s a fabulous place to go diving, we love staying at Buddy Dive, and we’ve already got seven people committed to the 2021 trip (so it’ll definitely go barring continuing COVID issues). Bonaire has extremely pleasant and consistent diving, plus we’ve got a good chance at spotting Frogfish and Seahorses, plus there’s always the nightly “River of Fish” that parades past Buddy Dive.

INDONESIA (October 17) – I love diving Indonesia and specifically

in Manado with Murex Dive Resort. We get a great mix of reef and muck, throw in a day trip to Bangka Island, eat way too much fabulous food, and enjoy ourselves on a fabulous property staffed by people who have become close friends over the years. But with the way things are in the U.S. as well as in Indonesia, I am doubtful that this one’s going to happen. There’s a chance Bali might open sometime soon but things in North Sulawesi – where Manado is – apparently are not very good and will take some time to get better.

SOCORRO (January 14-21) – THIS one I think will happen. Mexico is open to Americans even as we speak and given that this trip five more months down the road, we certainly have high hopes that the COVID virus will have at least calmed down somewhat if not run its course, or there will be a vaccine, or whatever. So I’ve got my fingers crossed, especially since it’s been ten years since we last visited. If you’ve never been, Socorro (really The Revillagigedos Islands) is located some 200+ miles SSW of Cabo San Lucas and is composed of three separate islands: Socorro, San Benedicto, and Roca Partida. The last one is my per-

sonal fav as it is literally a small rock - you can easily swim around it – 80 miles west of the other island and where you might see mantas, sharks (pretty much guaranteed), and maybe even Humpback Whales. All three of the islands offer pretty spectacular diving. We’ll be on the Nautilus Under Sea and while we’ve filled our 12 spots, I can still grab any of the five remaining spots. So if you’re interested in finding out more about this trip, shoot me an e-mail or give a call.

THE BALANCE OF 2021 – I’m not sure. I thinking I’ll be waiting to put together a 2021 schedule – other than Socorro and Bonaire - until we have a better handle on what the world situation is. No sense in scheduling things at this stage of the game unless you’re fairly certain the trip will happen.

So that also means that you can feel free to fire up the wish list and let me know of any locations you think we ought to consider. Dive travel is going to be, I think, very different once we put COVID behind us but I think it’s accurate to say there will be plenty of us itching to go visit some exotic places once we know we can do it safely.

2020-21 DIVING VACATIONS

October 17 • Indo (unlikely)

January 14-21 • Socorro

May 29 - June 5 • Bonaire

Fingers crossed for more



DAN ANNUAL FATALITY REPORT

If you've ever been to one of our annual "Why Divers Die" seminars (for the record – last year was the first year we didn't have a single fatality within L.A. County jurisdiction) at the Scuba Show, you know I'm a big believer in talking about all sorts of accidents, because the whole point is to learn from them and not repeat the mistakes that have gotten other divers into trouble.

So I'm very pleased to tell you that D.A.N. has just published their 2019 edition of the fatality report, which covers deaths and accidents that happened in 2017. (It always takes them two years to collect all the data and process the information.) This is a free publication and if you go to the D.A.N. website, just type in the search bar "fatality reports" and then select "DAN's Annual Diving Report." You'll be able to download a copy of 2019 (PDF) along with other going all the way back to 1988 (covering 1986 accidents).

Reading through some of them will have you shaking your head and going, "What were they thinking?" And in readings others you'll go, "I hadn't thought of things that way." The whole report is 114 pages but make sure you check out Case 1-17 starting on page 30. The phrase "After two days of near-miss underwater incidents . . ."

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Aug. 13	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Sat.	22	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Wed.	26	- CLASS -	- FISH ID -	\$25
Sat.	Sept. 5	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Sun.	20	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	24	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Sat.	Oct. 10	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Wed.	14	- CLASS -	- TABLES & COMPUTERS -	FREE!!!

should tell you all you need to know about where this one was headed.

Whether you're a newbie or an old salt, lots of good info and I highly recommend – since you've probably still got time to fill – reading through this. And it's a lot more productive than searching for cat videos on FaceBook.



RETURN OF REEF SEEKERS REPAIRS (almost)

Reef Seekers Repair Guru Robert Stark and I have been putting the final touches on our plans to start doing repairs again in the midst of the COVID pandemic. We hope to be back up-and-running mid-August.

The overall plan is for a contact-less type of service. You'll be able to drop your gear off with Robert, he will then take it and likely let it sit for a few days to make sure that anything deep in the nooks and crannies is no longer infectious,

and then he can go to work.

Once done, we'll bag up your gear, likely let it sit again for a couple of days in self-quarantine, and then it'll be good-to-go. You'll make arrangements with Robert when to pick it up, that can also be done contact-less-ly, and we'll go ahead and bill your credit card (or you can put a check in the gear box).

As diving resumes, certainly on a local level, you want to make sure that your gear is in tip-top shape. This is especially true if it hasn't been used for quite some time and if you've not been in the water for a while. When you first take the plunge again, you want to ease your way back into things as the last thing you'll want to be dealing with underwater is uncooperative dive gear.

Because of the nature of how we'll have to do things, we'll be suspending our concierge service (where Robert comes and picks up your gear and then brings it back when completed) as well as we'll be suspending most rush service. Our normal turnaround time is a week anyhow – barring any complications or parts we don't have on hand – so hopefully none of this will be an inconvenience.

Keep an eye on TWARS (This Week at Reef Seekers) and we'll let you know when the repair floodgates are ready to open again.



OF TURTLES & BELUGAS

One of the many great things about summer diving in SoCal is that we start to get some “unusual” sightings of animals. Most of the time these are turtles or triggerfish who have come north as our waters have warmed during the year and they pay us a brief visit.

A few years ago, I was able to spot an unusual juvenile in the Underwater Park, right in front of the stairs. We took some pix, got Dr. Bill involved, and sent stuff off to the CA DF&W. Turns out what I spotted was a juvy White-Tailed

Damselfish, a cousin of the Garibaldi (which is the world’s largest damselfish) and who not only had never been spotted in our waters before, but who also was 200 miles north of the upper end of their range.

In fact, if you’ve ever gone looking for (and found) Scythe Butterflyfish at Catalina, they’re the ultimate example of this migration. It’s presumed that they migrated north during the El Ninos of the early 1980s and then they didn’t go back. They’ve been here long enough now that, while not native, they’re likely a subspecies since the fish that came here almost 40 years ago have long since had babies and died, those babies had babies and died, and the current ones are generations removed

from the originals.

And that brings us to another visitor, but this time from the north.

A Beluga Whale has been spotted a couple of times in July off of the coast of San Diego. They’re thought not to come further south than Alaska so you’ve really got to wonder why this creature is down here and, perhaps as importantly, can he/she get back home? But he/she seems healthy and to be moving normally, but you got to wonder: What brought this animal sooooo far south? I don’t think any Beluga’s ever been spotted in these waters before. (And from the pix, there’s no doubt as to what it is.)

So get out there and go look for unusual creatures. You never know what you’ll find.

PICTURE PAGE - COVID-free fish

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2020)



Great White Shark
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Whale Shark
Isla Mujeres



Damaged mouth
Palau



Porcupine puffer
Maldives



Manta Ray
Yap