

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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COVID UPDATES

Needless to say, with the spreading of the Delta variant and continued resistance to get the vaccine here in the US as well as shortages of the vaccine in other parts of the world that want it, the news isn't exactly rosy. Here are some scattered reports I've seen over the last few weeks:

PALAU – Just opened a few weeks ago. Aggressor is doing a \$1,000-off special for a while.

RAJA AMPAT – Just closed to all travel. Apparently they're having a very serious outbreak of the Delta variant and the limited medical facilities are being overwhelmed. Closed to ships and flights.

BONAIRE – Open. I know of a couple of trips that have gone there without incident. Not sure what the mitigation or mask-wearing requirements are once there.

ST. LUCIA – Seems to be open. Just saw a post from some folks who are there now and I know of a group planning on going next month.

MEXICO – Open. Major spots to fly into are Cabo San Lucas and Cozumel, as well as Cancun. Mexico is definitely experiencing an uptick in cases right now, but has not yet announced any new travel restrictions.

INDONESIA – Closed. Huge spike in both cases and deaths in the last few weeks. Based on the Worldometer chart, looks to be the highest it's been in about a year. Averaging around 45,000 new cases and 1,700 deaths per day. (As a comparison, the US, with a slightly larger population, is at 75,000 new cases but just under 300 deaths per day.) Java and Bali appear to be in some state of lockdown.

HAWAII – Open. If you're vaccinated, no pre-travel COVID test required (but you'll need to show proof of vaccination) and no quarantine required. Not vaccinated? Submit a negative COVID test that's no more than 72 hours old when you arrive in Hawaii. No test? Self-quarantine for 10 days upon arrival.

It distresses me that what should simply be a reaction to a global public health crisis has turned into such a politicized mess. When I was a kid and the polio vaccine came out, we went and got our shots or sugar cubes. If we had such an attitude today about not only taking care of ourselves but also a sense of social responsibility to our communities and fellow citizens, we could have made great strides or even licked COVID already. But sometimes it seems "You can't tell ME what to do" trumps common sense (which apparently isn't as common as we would have thought).

I know we'll reach the end of this tunnel one of these days, but it seems like we've got a bump in the road ahead of us. Hopefully once we get through this next surge, things will start to calm down (again) and many

of the places we love to go will once again welcome us with open (vaccinated) arms.



BILL ACKER ON ZOOM SEEKERS

Make a note to join us on Tuesday, August 10, at 7:30PM for our next Zoon Seekers session which will feature Bill Acker of Manta Ray Bay in Yap. Bill will not only extol the many virtues of a trip to Yap, but will also give us an update on what the COVID situation is there. Yap, and all of the Federated States of Micronesia, has put a total embargo on tourism traffic in or out. The good news is that they haven't had any cases of COVID. But the bad news is that for people like Bill, who depend on tourism to run their businesses, it's been devastating. So hopefully Bill will have some insight into what the future will hold.

As many of you know, Yap is one of my favorite places to visit. I think the diving is spectacular and varied, I think Manta Ray Bay is the nicest dive-dedicated resort I've ever been to, and we have a fabulous relationship with their always-accommodating staff. In Yap we get Manta Rays,

sharks, caverns, walls, Mandarinfish, and a whole lot more.

If we can schedule a trip there in 2022, we will. What we've done lately, and which I think has worked out REALLY well, is gone to a 10-days-in-Yap format. With travel time, it's two weeks, leaving LAX on a Monday morning flight and then returning on a flight that arrives back at LAX at 6AM two Sundays later. We're able to include a Manta ID class, a half-day land tour, and plenty of diving.

If you've been to Yap, come re-acquaint yourself with Bill. If you've never been, find out why those of us who have been there rave about it. Mark your calendar: Tuesday, August 10, &:30PM PDT.



PASSPORT RENEWAL

It's never too early to start thinking about renewing your passport, especially (despite the Delta variant), the world works at opening up again.

One important thing to remember is that many countries require your passport to be valid for at least six months after your trip. So it effectively means your passports are good for 9.5 years, not the full 10. On top of that, the State Department has built up a backlog for renewing passports to where it can take as much as 18 weeks now for regular service, and 12 weeks for expedited service. (Those numbers used to be around 10 and 5 weeks respectively.)

So you want to make sure you know when your passport expires, look at

what trips you hope to make and when, and plan accordingly. For me personally, my passport expires in August of 2022. So that pretty much means it's not going to do me any good after February 2022 because I'll be inside the 6-month window. We've got trips on the books right now for March and April so I'll need to get it back before then. But there's also a chance I may do a last-minute personal trip in late September or October and sending it in now may mean I won't have it back in time if that trip happens. Oy vey!!!

BTW, if you anticipate/hope for a lot of travel in the next ten years, make sure you check the box for the larger 52-page passport. There's no extra charge for this. And it makes sense since some countries require a full page to paste in a visa or travel permit and there's no sense in running out of pages when you can get more pages for the same price.

Also note that when you renew your passport, the new passport will have a different number than your old one. Make sure, once you get the new one, that you update this info in your Trusted Traveler profile (Global Entry and TSA Pre-Check) as well as with all the airlines you routinely fly.

Renewal is generally pretty easy as you can do it all on-line. You'll need to have a new picture for the new passport (neutral face or natural smile

against a white or off-white background), fill out all the on-line stuff, and then mail the new pix and the old passport in. Hopefully your new one comes back in time for whatever trip you have planned. Renewal fees are \$110 for regular service, and \$170 for expedited.

For more info, go to the State Department's website at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html>.

GREENLAND ISSUES

Arctic temperatures are (relatively) soaring and as a result, Greenland is suffering a very significant ice melt. Scientists are watching it carefully. Towards the end of July, most of the eastern side of Greenland had melted, which is significant. And while the amount of sea level rise that can come from this doesn't sound like much – a few centimeters – it's still enough to cause concern about increased flooding and storm surges for low-lying areas bordering the Atlantic.

This doesn't mean all hope is lost. As one scientist put it, "While such events are concerning, the science is clear. Meaningful climate targets and action can still limit how much the global sea level will rise this century, reducing the damage done by severe flooding to people and infrastructure around the world."

2022 DIVING VACATIONS

March 11-20 • Socorro

May 20-28 • Bonaire

July (??) • Indonesia

Fall (??) • Yap

SOCORRO IN MARCH

We've done three trips to Socorro, the magical islands (more correctly known as the Revillagigedos) 200+ miles SW of Cabo San Lucas. And because we had such a good time, we're going back again in March.

Socorro is a fabulous place for big animal encounters. We can pretty much guarantee you will see numerous species of sharks, a selection of Mantas, perhaps a Whale Shark or two, and who knows what else. One great thing about a trip in March is that by then, many Humpback Whales have come back to this area to mate or give birth, so you'll see both males along with females and their calves. And there's a very strong likelihood that we'll hear the males "singing" underwater, which is an amazing experience as their "songs" literally vibrate in your chest.

It's easy to get distracted by the big stuff and overlook small critters too, but there's plenty of those to be found if you don't want to spend time looking out into the blue for bigger guys. When we were there in 2010, weather limited where we could go on some days so we spent more time exploring the actual rocks and reefs instead of looking out into the blue. And there was plenty to see, some of which are on page 4 of this newsletter. If you'd like a more complete view, go to our website, click **PICTURE PAGES**, and then choose **SOCORRO 2010**.

Our trip this year was on the Nautilus Under Sea (formerly the Undersea Hunter in Cocos) and we liked the boat so much that we've booked it again for 2022. One big part of the appeal is that the boat maxes out at 19 divers. We're making it even better because we have four people who are doing single-supplements, so that will drop the "full" boat down to 15 divers. So if you're looking for a relatively uncrowded boat – the diving is done out of Zodiacs but even that won't feel too crowded – this might just be

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Aug. 12	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Mon.	16	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
Thu.	23	Redondo (Vets)	••• Night Dive •••	\$25
Wed.	29	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$160
Sat.	Oct. 9	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Wed.	20	--- CLASS ---	NAUI NITROX	\$75

what you're looking for.

Another advantage of being on a boat relates to COVID. To the best of my knowledge, everyone who's signed up so far has been vaccinated. Nautilus will also do a medical check before anyone gets on the boat. And once all of us vaccinated COVID-free people are on the boat and have left the dock, we've now established a bubble and all should be good.

As of this writing, we've only got four spots still available. Two are in one of the lower-deck staterooms and the other two are in the main-deck-level co-ed triple. (The triple is actually a quad but the fourth bunk is always left empty to provide for a little extra storage space.) Both rooms have bathrooms en suite.

The actual trip dates are March 12-20 but we plan on flying into Cabo San Lucas on March 11 (a Friday) and then will overnight at the Tesoro resort, which is also where the Nautilus dive shop is. So that will give us much of the day on the 12th to either relax, do a warm-up local dive, or even do some sightseeing if you like. We'll board the boat that evening and depart, spending the first full day at sea (great time to hook up gear and test cameras), and then will have five full days of diving, followed by a day at sea home, and then we're off the boat early on the 20th in time to make the afternoon flights back home.

This promises once again to be a fabulous adventure and if you'd like to snag one of these final spots, either e-mail us at kenkurtis@aol.com or call 310/652-4990.

AVALON IN AUGUST – DATE CHANGE

We're making a slight shift for our August Avalon trip and moving it from Wednesday 8/18, to Monday August 16. Because of the Catalina Express sked, this also means that for this trip, we'll leave out of Long Beach on the 8:15AM boat instead of San Pedro. As usual, we'll take a taxi from the Mole over to the Park and then will go grab some tanks. We will have time for three dives plus a break for lunch.

It sounds like many people have been getting great Giant Sea Bass encounters on their Park dives. The really cool thing is that you can really see them eye-balling you and trying to figure out what/who you are. And when they're close, you can REALLY get a good look at the parasites on their heads, and watch them move around the head and change position.

There's plenty of other stuff to see in the Park as well. There are healthy aggregations of Garibaldi and Kelp Bass, lots of Sheephead, and lately there have been some Largemouth Blennies spotted as well. When we were there last month, the kelp was back with a vengeance, the sargassum was gone, and we even spotted some abalone on a couple of the dives.

Cost is \$160 which includes the Express, taxi, tanks, and fills. (You bring everything else.) And if you haven't been in the water in a while, this is also a great way to get your gills wet. If you're interested in joining us, give us a call at 310/652-4990.

REVIEWING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Starting around 2004 and completed in 2012, California established a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within state waters. The general goal of these were to increase animal diversity and biomass over time, and part of the process involves revisiting the areas periodically to see if those lofty goals are being met. One standard calls for the review to be undertaken every ten years which means next year.

I was proud to be part of the State-wide Interests Group during that process, advising the various iterations helping to create the MPAs and trying to represent the viewpoints of the various factions within the diving community. Because of that, I've been invited for the next 18 months to be part of the Decadal Review Steering

Committee whose purpose is to help monitor the process of getting input from various stakeholders and communities to make sure that everyone who wants to offer an opinion can be heard. We will not be setting policy. We'll simply be making sure that all of this is accessible and out in the open.

Much of this will take place during 2022 in the form of Zoom webinars, in-person meetings, booths at ocean-related consumer shows, and other areas. A lot of the mechanics of this are being formulated now. And while it's easy to think, "None of this really will make a difference," that's simply not true. While not every suggestion will be followed, any suggestions never made will certainly not be considered. So part of our job is also to encourage public participation.

In its simplest form, the task will involve looking to see if specific

MPAs are meeting their goals and what changes might be needed to make them more effective. Sometimes that may mean eliminating an MPA and opening it back up. And sometimes that may mean expanding existing MPAs, or altering regulations, or even creating new MPAs to strengthen the network.

I hope you'll get involved in the process. It's a bit more complex than just "fish here and don't fish there." If you're unfamiliar with the ins and outs of MPAs, there's some great information to be found at <https://californiampas.org/>. The info there can give you a good start on the background you will need to make intelligent comments or recommendations if you choose to participate.

It's a long process but a fruitful one, and a journey best made when as many people as possible participate. I hope you'll come along for the ride.

PICTURE PAGE - Socorro not-sharks

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2021)



**Clarion Damsel fish,
absent many other places**



P.O. Box 634
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

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**The gorgeous
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**Lobsters
are out in the open**



**Curious
Mexican Hogfish**