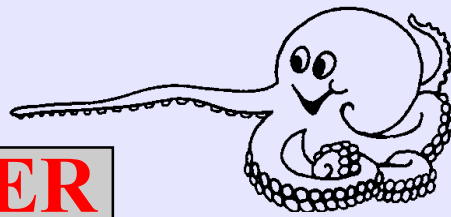


THE REEF SEEKER



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August - 2024



GETTING INTO PRIME DIVE SEASON HERE

The arrival of August can sometimes seem bittersweet. On the one hand, it signals that September is just around the corner and that means fall is on the way. But on the other hand, it means there's still one more month of summer to go (notwithstanding those schools that will start the new academic year in August).

And as August blends into September and then October and even into November, we're coming into some of the best diving that SoCal has to offer. Water temps are at their peak generally in September/October – I actually saw a clip of a guy who said he was already diving the Underwater Park in a 3mm - and it's not unheard of to get days of 100-foot visibility, especially if you can get out to the outer islands like Santa Barbara or San Clemente Islands.

Even if you're limited to local on-shore diving, the coming months can be a boon for you. When the

Santa Anas start blowing, they flatten out the incoming surf and frequently result in spectacular near-shore visibility. (I remember diving Malaga Cove one time years ago where, from the top of the bluff, the water was so clear you could easily see the fish swimming around.)

So whether you're a newbie, an old salt, or something in-between, hopefully you're making plans to get out there and dive in the coming months.



GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

There's no question booking airfare today can be a daunting task and the fare you get today may not be the fare you see tomorrow. It could be higher or it could be lower. The person who buys their ticket months ahead of time may not get the same price as the person who buys their tickets weeks ahead of time. It's sort of like playing the

stock market and your goal should be to "buy low."

One option that people may not realize exists is the ability to lock in a fare without actually buying the ticket. On United, this is known as "Farelock." Other airlines have similar programs with different names.

But basically what you do is search out the itinerary you want and see what the fare is. For a nominal fee (United's is around \$13), you can lock in the fare for as long as fourteen days. This gives you time to firm up plans, shop for other fares, and stuff like that. If you decide you don't want to actually purchase the ticket, the itinerary is cancelled and you're out the \$13.

But if you do purchase it, you'll still get the fare you were quoted when you instituted the Farelock, even if the current airfare is higher than what you were originally quoted. And if the fare has gone down between the time you made the original reservation and when you're ready to pay, simply cancel the original, eat the \$8, and make a new reservation at the lower price.

Since more and more these days, even on group trips, you are going to be asked to book your own airfare, taking advantage of these kinds of programs can really save you a lot of money in the long run.



THINKING ABOUT 2025 TRAVEL

I'm now actively trying to put together our trip sked for 2025.

We generally do five or six trips a year and we've already got our back-to-back Maldives trips from mid-September-to-mid-October 2025, so that's two. We also usually plan our Reef Seekers trips for odd-numbered months (January, March, May, July, September, November) due to our other commitments for things like Chamber Day and the Avalon Underwater Cleanup.

Among the candidates for next year (at the moment) are:

EASTER ISLAND – We went in 2011 and again in 2019. As you may know, Easter Island – more correctly known as Rapa Nui – is home to dozens of the large statues known as Moai. That in and of itself is enough reason to go visit. But it's also the most isolated inhabited island in the world and that sets up some interesting underwater opportunities. For one thing, 25% of the fish there are endemic. For another, because of its remoteness, it has very little plankton in the water which can mean visibility up to 200 feet. So we try to plan this as a combo diving/touring trip where three days are full dive days and three days are ½ day of diving followed by ½ day of visiting the various Moai sites. I'm thinking maybe

March. It's a 9-day trip with travel, leaving on a Friday and returning the following Sunday.

BAHAMAS – The other sub-question is, specifically where? The Bahamas is made up of 300 islands, some of which have diving, some of which don't. We could do this as land-based or even do a liveaboard. We've been to Grand Bahama a number of times but not in a number of years. Then there's Nassau, San Salvador, and Andros. Lots of possibilities. Possibly looking at May.

ANTHONY'S KEY IN ROATAN – We had a good time this year and it's relatively easy to get to: LAX to either Dallas, Houston, or Atlanta, and then into Roatan. It's an all-inclusive resort so you've got diving, room, and meals all wrapped into one package. But we'll try to avoid the sugar cane-burning season which happens after the harvest in May and which affected our flights this year due to smoke in the air. So I'm thinking maybe we'd go in July instead.

Other suggestions have included Belize, Turks & Caicos, Hawaii, and Cozumel. The bottom line is that we're willing to go where you want to go. It's just a question of

figuring that out. So if one of these choices appeals to you, or if you have something else in mind, now's the time to let us know.

HAPPY TO ADVISE IF YOU NEED HELP

Obviously, we'd prefer you travel with us. But, since we do this all the time, we may know a thing or two. So if you're planning travel on your own and are getting stuck, perplexed, or mystified by the range of options out there, feel free to call us for some advice.

The trickiest is any trip where you're crossing the International Dateline. And even worse are redeyes that leave near midnight AND go across the Dateline. There are certainly times when someone's called us for advice and our answer is, "You're arriving a day after your boat left."

But we're happy to be a travel reference for you. We've been doing this since 1988, so we've picked up a trick or two along the way. Give us a call at 310/652-4990 or send an e-mail, lay out the problem, and we'll see what we can do.

2024 DIVING VACATIONS

September 9-22 • Yap

November 3-10 • Palau

March, May, July 2025 - ???

Sept. 2025 • Maldives B-2-B

VALUE OF A GOOD GUIDE

Especially when you're diving an unfamiliar area – but it applies to your regular dive haunts as well – nothing beats having a good guide to show you some stuff. I've always felt one of the tricks to spotting unusual creatures is that you have a good foundation of fish ID, which then allows you to "filter" out the commonplace and spot the animal that rare or unusual.

Some years ago when I was doing a dive in the Avalon Underwater park – not a place you'd expect to find unusual creatures – as I kicked in and was right in front of the stairs and literally in only a few feet or water, I spotted a fish that looked out of place. It seemed like a juvy Garibaldi, and was hanging with a bunch of them, but the coloration wasn't quite right.

Turns out it was a juvy Whitetail Damselfish that had never before been spotted that far north as its normal range ends in northern Baja. But if I hadn't known what was common, I never would have been able to spot what was unusual.

This is a pitch not only for you to get educated about fish ID, but also to point out how helpful a good guide can be.

On our Indonesia trip last month, we had great guides. The spotting skills of all of the Murex DMs – lead DM Basrah Tan, along with Alvian, Laurens, and Janri – are amazing. Granted that lot of times some of these critters are fairly territorial so that means they have a general idea of where to find them. But even so, it takes a practiced eye to find a 1-inch long

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Aug. 10	Redondo/Vets	Beach Diving	FREE
Wed.	14	--- CLASS ---	--- Secrets of Fish ID ---	35
Wed.	28	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	180
Thu.	Sept. 5	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	FREE
Sat.	7	Redondo/Vets	Navigation	35
Wed.	Oct. 9	--- CLASS ---	--- Tables & Computers ---	35
Sat.	12	Redondo/Vets	Taming Surf Entries	FREE
Wed.	16	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	180

Painted Frogfish that's hiding in the coral. Pretty impressive.

And that brings up a general point about dive guides worldwide. Some are good critter spotters and some are simply diver-minders. I've been diving with operations where it seemed the main function of the DM/guide was to signal the group to turn around 30 minutes into a dive. Well, I've got a watch, so that doesn't really enhance my dive experience. But it's unlikely I'll be finding that Pygmy Seahorse on the seafan and I might miss the Leaf Scorpionfish perched in the branches of coral, and that's where DMs like those at Murex really earn their keep (and their well-deserved end-of-the-trip tips).

So the next time you're on a guided dive, get some understanding of what the dive guide feels his/her role is. And if you have specific requests, let them know. They may not always be able to fulfill the request but you've got nothing to lose by asking. And when a guide is working overtime to find you the "good" stuff, make sure to reward them accordingly at the end of your trip.

USE GOOD JUDGMENT

There are always on-going discussions about diving safety and

whether one agency is better than another or if a certain gear configuration makes you safer. In our opinion, none of that is going to matter much if you don't use good judgment.

We feel the single most important piece of equipment you take with you on a dive is your brain. And it doesn't matter who trained you or what gear you're wearing if you stop using your head when you dive. Every year, we hear stories of well-equipped and well-trained divers who make what, in hindsight, are stupid decisions that get them in trouble, sometimes with fatal results.

We have a favorite saying at Reef Seekers: You never get hurt on a dive you don't make.

Talk to anyone who's had a close call and they'll invariably say something like, "I should have known better," or "I just wasn't listening to that little voice in the back of my head that was telling me not to do this."

While good training and equipment are certainly important, they can easily be over-shadowed by bad judgment. Be a smart diver. Know your limits and dive within them. And don't worry about what others will think if you bail on a dive. There's no sin in sitting one out. This is your life we're talking about. It's always better to be around to dive another day.

NEW GoPRO????

I've been shooting with a GoPro Hero9 for about four years now. I started off with a 2, then got a 4, then a 7, now the 9. The very first GoPro came out in December of 2008. The Hero2 was introduced in September of 2010. Since 2016 (Hero5), GoPro has generally released a new version every year in September. I'm trying to figure out – as are others who use GoPros – whether there will be a Hero13 in a month or so.

GoPro's made a lot of advances since I started shooting with them. Much better resolution, image stabilization, slow-mo, and a bunch of other improvements, including the sensors and the processing chips. I still feel they're sort of

crappy underwater still cameras, because they tend to give you either a very high ISO (noisy image) or slow shutter speed (blurry) or both. On the surface in good light they can give you very good still pix. Underwater, not so much. It would be nice if that was improved.

But overall the GoPros are a marvelous camera and they created really an entire industry of small action cameras as they now have competition from DJI, Insta360, Oclu, and more. (But not all of them have an underwater case.) the quality of these cameras is now good enough that you even have broadcast operations incorporating them into their plans when they need a small cam in a tight spot that produces quality images.

If you're going to get into video,

you'll also need a good editing program. There are tons of them out there. GoPro has a proprietary one, there's OBS, Pro Tools, Premier Elements (which is what I use for the Reef Seekers videos), and others.

I don't shoot a lot of video on our trips – I'm still a Nikon still camera kind of guy – but I do try to shoot one dive per day with just video so we can share some of those with you too. And since we've got the Yap trip coming up September 9, then I'm going to the Philippines September 22 (on my own – special trip), and we have Palau November 3-10, I'm anxiously awaiting GoPro's presumed announcement of the new camera and will see if it's worth moving up. Fingers crossed.

PICTURE PAGE - Indonesia 2024

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2024)



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