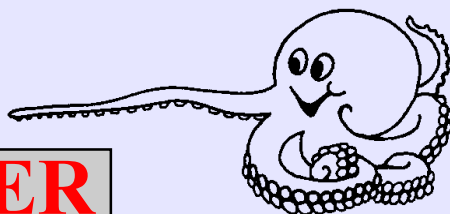


THE REEF SEEKER



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August - 2026



EL NIÑO IS HERE

And we're certainly not saying "Welcome!!" . . .

We've been mentioning this lot lately but there are plenty of signs that the El Niño is already here and affecting us. And predications and models indicate that it will only get stronger in the next few months and it's unclear as to how long it may last.

In "normal" times, we get our peak water temps sometime around the end of September or even mid-October. But usually that peak is somewhere around 70°. One indication of the presence and effect of the El Niño is down at Scripps Pier where they regularly monitor the surface water temp as well as the bottom temp. On July 28, the surface temp was 75.7° and the bottom temp was 75.0°. These reading are 5-7° above the long-term average for this date. That's significant.

We also see El Niño manifested in the form of Hurricane Genevieve, a category 3 storm, which is just west of Socorro and is moving

towards the WNW towards Hawaii. It seems pretty early in the season to get a storm of this size.

We're also hearing about unusual animal sightings like turtles, seahorses, "foreign" fish, and others, all again a sign of the warmer waters that have developed here.

One of the upsides of this is that the viz has been phenomenal lately. The fall months – September, October, and into November – usually provide us with the clearest water we get all year, and visibility of 100 feet (especially out at remote islands like San Clemente) are not unheard of. But we're already getting reports of 80-foot viz at the Avalon Underwater Park and also in places around the frontside of Catalina. That's just amazing.

And with the warmer water temps, let alone the good viz, it's almost like tropical diving so maybe some of you will whip out your 3mm suits and dive Catalina that way. In the late 80s during a similar El Niño, I did exactly that and while it felt just a bit chilly at first, you got used to it and it was nice not to have to wear as much weight.

So it all seems good for diving but there's a downside to all of this too. The higher water temps will likely decimate the kelp which has a tolerance up to about 70°. Once you start going much above that,

the kelp sort of disintegrates and dies. The means less home area for the fish as well as with less kelp, it may allow an invasive species like Sargassum to gain a foothold and thrive.

Additionally, El Niño usually comes with warmer land temps as well. That means the brush dries out. And because the warmer ocean waters don't allow for as much cooling at night, nor a sea breeze that brings in moisture, that means already dry brush dries out even further. That increases the fire danger. And if you get windy conditions like we had in January 2025, all hell can break loose.

If that's not bad enough, once the El Niño is over, it leaves conditions ripe for increased rainfall in the early months of the following year. So you increase the fire danger and then, if fires develop, you now have a chance of mudslides when the rains come because the now-bare-fire-scarred ground has no way of trapping and holding the rainfall.

So El Niño is not just a one-trick pony nor has a one-dimensional effect on us. There's a lot of stuff going on here and while it will be nice to enjoy the improved diving conditions (except for the decimated kelp), be aware of the climatological price that we will pay for that.



LET'S GO DIVE SABA (CARIBBEAN)

Whenever we put together our diving vacation sked for a given year, we're always faced with that age-old question: Do we go to where we've been or do we try something new? There are arguments for both.

In 2027, we're going to try a mix of the two, with plans to re-visit Bonaire and Roatan, as well as at least two new spots (for us) which would be the Seychelles (part of our Total Solar Eclipse trip package that I'm still working on) and Saba, a speck of an island in the Caribbean (see map). Our impetus for the last one comes from one of our regular divers, Audrey Anderson, who has been there four previous times and was simply enchanted with the place.

We're still working on the timing for this trip. This is based both on airline skeds as well as hotel availability in Saba. Whatever we choose, this will be an 8-day trip with travel. Basically it's Saturday-Saturday but that might mean leaving Friday night &/or arriving home on Sunday. That's based on airline connection.

Right now, we're looking at either something mid-February through mid-march or even end-of-march into early April. The determining factor will be the hotel availability. Either way, we're planning on

doing our dives with SeaSaba.

One thing you'll appreciate about Saba is the relative tranquility. They don't do any mass tourism. So there aren't any cruise ships docking, or large resorts. In fact, there are only about 2,000 people that live there. The entire island is only about 5 square miles. It's volcanic – no recent eruptions though – and it literally rises steeply out of the ocean. Mount Scenery is the peak at a height of just under 3,000 feet.

You get there from St. Maarten so we'd fly from LAX through Newark or Washington, D.C., Atlanta, or Miami (depends on the airline) and then we'd either take a 90-minute ferry from St. Maarten or the 12-minute plane ride into what is called the shortest active commercial airport runway in the world. Either way, it's an adventure.

I haven't worked out the diving sked yet but their basic thing is a 2-tank morning dive from roughly 9AM-1PM each day. Afternoon dives are available as well as the occasional night dive. We'd likely book it as a combination of 2-dive and 3-dive days. That also means on the 2-dive days, there's time to

explore Saba, do some hikes, check out local crafts, or just relax.

The two hotels we're looking (Juliana's and Scenery) are both located about halfway up the mountain (much cooler than at sea level) and some of the rooms offer spectacular views. I think we'll set it up so we have breakfast at the hotel each day, but will be on our own for lunch and dinner. However, there seem to be numerous small eateries close to the hotel, as well as there's taxi service readily available. Speaking of which . . .

Once we get there, we'll do an orientation at the hotel and the first dive day morning the Sea Saba crew will pick up our dive gear where it'll be loaded on their boat and live there for the entirety of our stay. There's a complimentary taxi service that will take us from the hotel (around 8:30AM) to the boat each morning and then bring us back later. On the 3-dive days, we'll get lunch down near Sea Saba and then head out for the afternoon dive. I'm generally thinking – and this is all subject to change – we arrive on a Saturday afternoon, do a single afternoon dive Sunday, 2-tank on Monday, 3-tank on Tuesday, 2-tank on Wednesday, 3-tank

2026-2027 DIVING VACATIONS

September 2026 • Philippines

Late March 2027 • Saba

Mid-May • Bonaire

July/Aug • Dive & Eclipse

on Thursday, 2-tank on Friday, dry gear in the afternoon, and we leave for home on Saturday. So 13 dives total.

The reasons I haven't locked in dates yet are a combination of trying to figure out the airline sked (it seems United stops flying there after early March) and the hotel availability (Scenery is available in February but Juliana's is not but Scenery is a bit more expensive - it's more of a boutique hotel and all of their rooms are king beds which complicates things for non-couples - but they both seem available at the end of March). But December through May is considered prime diving season so no matter when we plan for this, it sounds like it'll be a good time to go.

If you're interested in joining us for this, no need for a deposit yet or a firm commitment yet, shoot me an e-mail if you haven't already or give me a call at 310/652-4990 and I'll put you on my list. We've done some other islands in that general area (Dominica, Puerto Rico, etc.) and are looking forward to adding Saba to our list of destinations that we've visited.

INDONESIA

We had a great time diving with our friends at Murex in Manado, Indonesia, last month. I've put a few of the pictures on page 4. The diving there is always unique and different, plus they've made some wonderful upgrades and construction at the resort that also helps elevate the entire experience.

One thing I did notice, and it's something I see fairly consistently

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED ACTIVITY	\$\$\$
Sat.	Aug. 1	Veterans Park	Surf Entries Made Easy	FREE!!!
Wed.	5	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	180
Sat.	15	Veterans Park	Beach Diving Made Easy	FREE!!
Thu.	20	Veterans Park	••• Night Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	29	Veterans Park	Navigation Made Easy	FREE!!!
Wed.	Sep. 2	--- CLASS ---	--- FISH I.D. MADE EASY ---	25
Thu.	Oct. 8	Veterans Park	••• Night Dive •••	25
Sat.	17	Veterans Park	Surf Entries Made Easy	25

now in various parts of the world, was that there was noticeable particulate in the water on most of the dives. Obviously, this makes photographing a little more challenging due to backscatter but it just generally got me to wondering if this is simply part of climate change and global warming that's affecting more and more of the places we go visit.

Here's what I said in the trip report: *"Overall this time, we had a mixed bag of diving conditions (which is certainly not the fault of Murex). I seem to recall that when we first came in 2000, we had numerous dives where the viz approached 100 feet. Not so this time. Although we had one dive like that, most of the dives were in the 40-60 foot range, with a fair amount of particulate in the water, which makes things tough if you're photoing or videoing. By the same token, this is a comment I seem to be making more and more in my travels around the world. Maybe this is just the way things are &/or a by-product of climate change. I truly don't know. But the days of saying the water is "crystal clear" seem to be less and less."*

You can access the full report from the landing page on our website. Go to www.reefseekers.com, scroll down a little bit, and you'll see both of the links towards the top of the page. Enjoy!!!



SEARCHING FOR SHARKS

An ocean without sharks is not a healthy ocean. Sharks are the top predators and, despite the bad press they sometimes get, are basically garbage disposals of the ocean. They eat the things that are dead and dying which improves the overall health and stability of an eco system. So it should come as no surprise that we've got sharks off of our SoCal coastline, the most common of which is the Leopard Shark.

But what may surprise you is that we also have Great White Sharks off of our coastline. The theory that's developed over the years is that the general SoCal area is a pupping ground for Great Whites. They're born somewhere in our local waters and spend their first few years here, when their diet consist of fish, not mammals (like seals and sea lions). And every year, there's some story or drone footage of juvenile Great Whites in the vicinity of unknowing swim-

mers, each of them doing what they do without bothering the other. But, in an abundance of caution, once that becomes known, lifeguards sometimes close those beaches as a precaution.

Well, now they're getting some help in that area.

California State University Long Beach's Shark Lab has developed a new semi-autonomous shark surveillance robot (pix on page 3), still a prototype, but whose purpose is to monitor sharks. And the plan is to be able to send real-time information about sharks in a given area to local lifeguards. Best of all, the robot will be able to identify the species of shark as well.

"Our data suggests that there are sharks around our beaches all the

time without incident, but knowing what sharks, and how many are out there help lifeguards make better decisions in beach safety operations and in advising the public," Shark Lab Director Dr. Chris Lowe said.

They also plan to add a drone to the robot for an aerial view. The drone will launch once sharks have been detected. The floating robot itself will also be able to listen for previously-tagged Great Whites and even test the water for shark DNA, to identify which specific sharks might be around.

The project still has a ways to go to be fully operational but as the Shark Lab folks have stated, "We're off to a good start."

(Thanks to Laurie Powers for the heads-up.)



LOOK AT THIS!!!

This cutie is an Arctic Bobtail squid, observed for the first time in its natural environment by an ROV. As the Arctic warms, scientists are striving to document creatures before they disappear. But it illustrates what I frequently say which is: You've got to go look to see things. So whether it's in chilly Arctic waters or our warming Pacific waters, get out and dive and see what you can see!!!

PICTURE PAGE - Incredible Indonesia

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2026)



**Seahorse
on the sand**



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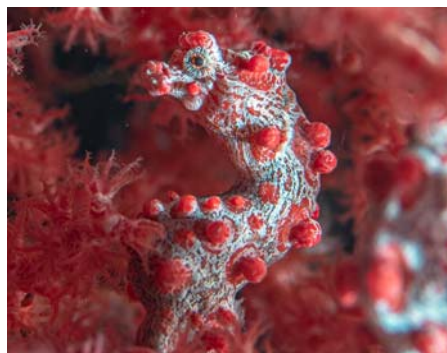
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**Emperor
Shrimp**



**Painted
Frogfish**



**Pygmy
Seahorse**



**Shrimp
Goby**