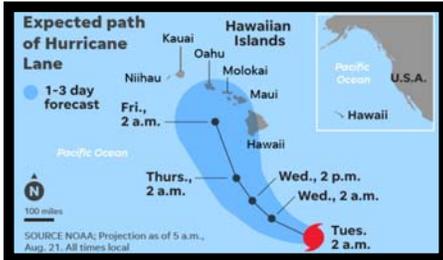


# THE REEF SEEKER



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## HURRICANE DIVING

You've booked a great dive vacation. You've paid for plane tickets. You've had your gear serviced, maybe even bought some new things. And then, the week before you're about to leave, you check the weather forecast and see there's a hurricane forming whose projected path crosses right over your dive destination. What do you do?

That's the dilemma last month that confronted two longtime Reef Seekers divers, Vick & Elisabeth, (and many other divers as well). Vick & Elisabeth have been diving with us for a number of years (although this was a trip they booked on their own) and we thought we'd use their experience to illustrate a number of points.

The short version is that everything worked out fine in the end. But it was touch-and-go for a while and they decided one day not to go and then decided the next day that they'd give it a shot.

They had booked themselves for a week on the *Kona Aggressor*, a trip they've done a number of times

before and have always enjoyed. They live in the southwest and were set to fly out on a Friday to Kona (through Phoenix) and then would board the boat the next day. But Hurricane Lane gave them pause to think.

One of the lessons here is about trip insurance. Vick & Elisabeth had it for this trip. But it may not have necessarily paid off. Many insurance policies would only pay if either the airline cancelled the flight because they couldn't fly into Kona (and missed the boat), or if the *Aggressor* cancelled the trip. There's no payment if they decide on their own that they're not comfortable going.

By the same token, many travel insurance companies also offer some form of cancel-anytime-for-any-reason insurance, but it's usually more expensive (perhaps as much as 25% of your trip cost) than it's-not-my-fault insurance (maybe 5-10% of the trip cost). But the former usually covers everything, including "I just don't feel like going," which justifies the higher cost.

And at some level, you have to decide if you want to gamble and either go with no-fault insurance or no insurance. In the roughly 40 years I've been organizing and running dive travel trips, I've never once had to cancel a trip. How-

ever, I've certainly had individuals on trips have to cancel at the last minute, and there have been trips that have either experienced some weather delays or came close to being cancelled but we were able to adjust at the last minute.

This also underscores - allow me to digress for a moment - the value of dealing with an experienced travel provider, and especially one who can handle things first-hand. I remember one trip we were doing to La Paz many years ago and a hurricane was threatening. I kept checking the National Hurricane Center (NHC) for projected paths and it looked like it was going to be a direct hit on La Paz the day we were going to go in. So I contacted the airline and made some contingency arrangements for an alternate flight into Cabo if the La Paz one got cancelled, and contacted the dive company to have some vans standing by in case we needed to come up from Cabo.

Sure enough, literally as I pulled up to the terminal at LAX at 8AM for our 10AM flight, my phone rang with a robo-call announcing that the La Paz flight was cancelled because the airport was closed all day. Needless to say, the lines in the terminal were huge as people scrambled to make alternate arrangements. No worries on our end. I simply parked my group off to the side, called my contact at

the airline, had our flights switched to an 11AM flight to Cabo as previously arranged, got the bags checked, arranged for the vans to pick us up, and it all worked out fine and we had a good trip. Some say we got lucky. I like to think it's the embodiment of the definition of luck: Preparation meets opportunity.

Back to Vick & Elisabeth and Kona.

They called me early in the week and asked me what I thought. At that point, it looked like Lane was going to score a direct hit on the Big Island and things were not looking good. They didn't want to lose their money and I pointed out that the airline tix, as long as they were cancelled before the flight took off, would likely be good for a while longer. The *Aggressor* is another story.

They have a "Storm Check Policy" (<https://www.aggressor.com/stormcheck.php>) where the short version is that if you lose any days of diving due to a NOAA-named storm, you'll receive a voucher credit (not a refund) for the number of days missed. The voucher is good for that destination (unclear if it's transferable or not) and is good for one year from the date of the days missed. But the catch is you have to show up for the trip.

So V&E were faced with the dilemma of flying to Kona and maybe having to spend the first day or two or three either on a boat that wasn't going anywhere or in a Kona hotel. Not the greatest choice to have to make. Initially, they decided that there were too many variables working against them and that they weren't going to go. But then the storm started turning west.

And that changed everything.

They were in touch with the Aggressor's Kona office who told them that at worst, it looked like that they may lose a day of diving. They contacted the airline who told them that it would be raining but that the airport should be open.

As they continued to check the NHC website about the storm (<https://www.nhc.noaa.gov>), the news got better and better and they decided to give it a go.

Vick has been updating me via e-mail regularly (they're on the last dive day of the trip as I'm writing this), and he tells me it's all worked out well. There was a light rain when they landed on Friday, the sun was shining Saturday morning, they boarded the boat on time that afternoon, and the diving's been very good. In an e-mail yesterday, Vick told me, "If one didn't know the hurricane passed by, you'd have no idea one was recently in the area. The dive sites haven't changed and the usual weather is here."

So all's well that ends well. But the experience of V&E, whether you're with a group or traveling on your own, indicates that it's never

as simple as deciding you want to go to a certain place at a certain time.

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## **POTENTIAL 2019 DIVE VACATIONS**

All without weather-related problems. (Hopefully the lead article doesn't scare you off.) But here's sort of what I'm thinking. None of this is etched in stone and I've got scheduling flexibility. But if any of these are of interest to you and you haven't let me know yet, let me know. (And I'm REALLY excited about the potential November trip). Here we go:

### **EASTER ISLAND - JANUARY**

We were there in 2011 and it was a fabulous experience. The diving's not phenomenal but it's certainly enjoyable and the viz can be upwards of 200 feet. Plus you've got the Moai, which are the famous large carved heads and statues. We'll do a combination of diving and land tours as Easter Island, the most isolated inhabited island in the world, is also an excellent and educational microcosm of climate change, overuse of limited resources, idol worship, civil war,

## **2019 DIVING VACATION THOUGHTS**

**January • Easter Island**

**March • Yap & Truk**

**May • Bonaire**

**July • Indonesia**

and more. Really a fascinating week. I don't have pricing yet but airfare is around \$2,000 and I guess the diving/land package to be around \$3,500.

### YAP & TRUK - MARCH

Do one, do them both. You know how much I love Yap and as long as we're there, why not get a week in at Truk as well? Not sure if the Truk portion will be boat or land-based. If boat (*Truk Odyssey*), we'd have to have a specific number of people commit to the trip. If land-based, much more flexibility. We would also likely do Truk first, so would also have the option of extending Yap to a 10-day instead of a 7-day trip. Airfare \$2,000-2,500, Yap \$2,500-3,500 (depending on length of stay), Truk \$3,000-\$4,500 depending land or boat. (We could also do this at a different time of the year. Not married to March.)

### BONAIRE - MAY

Always a good time to go, staying at Buddy Dive, post-Chamber Day (so it's really like a vacation for me), and it's my birthday month too. Airfare \$800-ish, resort with diving and car under \$2,200-ish.

### INDONESIA - JULY

It's been far too long since we've gone back to dive with our friends at Murex in Manado. So perhaps we can make 2019 the "Return to Manado" year. I love going back here, not only because this is where my nickname of "Opa Gila" originated, but also because the diving is superb and the staff at Murex takes exceptionally good care of us. This will be a combination of reef diving in Bunaken, muck diving along Manado Bay (some really good sites there), and a day trip to the legendary Lembeh Straits. The other nice thing about

## UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Sept. 6	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	<b>FREE!!!</b>
Sat.	15	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Thu.	20	- CLASS -	- PHOTO WORKSHOP -	<b>\$25</b>
Thu.	Oct. 4	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	<b>FREE!!!</b>
Sat.	13	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Sat.	20	Redondo	Beach dive (single tank)	<b>\$25</b>
Thu.	25	- CLASS -	- NAUI NITROX -	<b>\$75</b>

this trip is that we can add a few days at the back end in Singapore, truly one of the great cities in the world. Airfare is around \$1,450 (but can fluctuate), Murex all-in around \$2,500, Singapore Stop-over on the way back \$500-ish.

### ISLA MUJERES - AUGUST

The great thing about doing this is that trip I end up loving become trips YOU end up loving and this is another one. Whale Sharks, cenotes, and reefs, all in a relaxing atmosphere on a somewhat remote island. What more could you ask for? The highlight here is snorkeling amongst the world's largest known congregation of Whale Sharks with literally hundreds of individuals around. Then we throw in a couple of cenote dives, a wreck, some nice reefs, and even underwater statues. Every day is something different. Airfare (to Cancun) \$500, diving/hotel/cenotes/xfers \$2,500.

### MALDIVES - OCTOBER

We had such a good time in 2016 that we think we need to go back but this time we're heading north. One of the hopes is to catch the massive Manta congregations that feed on plankton in the Baa Atoll region this time of the year. We may get skunked, but we may get lucky. And there's plenty of good diving up there whether we get the mantas or not. We'll once again be on the mighty *Manthiri* under the watchful eyes ace Divemaster

Moosa Hasan. One nice thing about this trip (other than the diving) is that *Manthiri* only takes 12 people total, so it's a nice, small group. Plus we'll have a chance post-trip to spend some time in whatever gateway city we go through. In 2016 that was Istanbul. For 2019, it could be Hong Kong, Seoul, or Dubai. Airfare \$1,500-ish. *Manthiri* \$5,500 (9 days).

### CABO PULMA - NOVEMBER

This is the one that's really got me intrigued. As many of you know, we ran annual trips to the Sea of Cortez for 26 years. It was a very special place for us and I miss going there. By the same token, there was one place in the Sea of Cortez that we never got to go to because it was out of the range of La Paz and that was diving Cabo Pulmo, the only hard coral reef in the Sea of Cortez, a UNESCO World Heritage site (as is Easter Island), and one of the most successful, in terms of biodiversity, marine protected areas in the world, with over 6,000 species documented. Best of all, we can now do this from a boat (instead of land-based) as *Nautilus Explorer* will be running the *Nautilus Gallant Lady* there in 2019, carrying a maximum of 12 passengers. The ship will anchor just outside the Park boundaries and we'll dive off of small, fast pangas, with 6 divers/panga (and a DM/guide as required by Park rules). *Nautilus* has set these up as 6-day trips, but Day 1

and Day 6 are transfer days so we're looking at four full days of diving, with up to 4 dives each day plus a night dive or two. The fish diversity is fabulous and this sounds like a great way to really get immersed in the area. Airfare (Cabo) \$300, *Nautilus Gallant Lady* \$3,000-3,500. (If there's enough interest, we could do back-to-back trips.)

So that's the tentative plan. See what fits your interests and your budget and let me know. Some trips can be done with only a few people, some require more, but our goal is to show you the best possible diving that we can find on a given trip. Reef Seekers has 30 years of creating lifetime memories for you, and we're looking forward to doing it again next year.

## END TO A WEIRD SUMMER

Labor Day seems to mark the psychological end of summer. Fall usually offers the best diving conditions of the year. But this summer has been a strange one and even a disappointment.

The visibility has really been low most of the year. Last Saturday in Avalon, we had perhaps 20-30 feet with a lot of particulate in the water. Dr. Bill Bushing told me that that was the best he'd seen it all summer. (This time of year, it's not unusual to get 60'+ in the Park.)

The other side of this is that with the water so warm, and our peak water temps - which usually hit in October - yet to come, this could be a very comfortable fall. Hope-

fully the visibility will pick up and the warmer water may keep some tropical-ish species around (there have been numerous turtle sightings over the summer). But it also could spell some trouble for the kelp, which is already showing signs of stress from the elevated water temps.

But, as we say, you'll never know unless you go underwater and look. We've got a number of things happening this fall and through the end of the year including day trips to Avalon, single-tank beach dives at Vets Park in Redondo, and some night dives there as well.

Diving's still one of the greatest scavenger hunts in the world and hopefully you'll use the coming months to get wet and to see what's out there.

# PICTURE PAGE - The places we've been

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2018)



**Easter  
Island**



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**Midway  
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& the Red Sea**



**Crystal River,  
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Mujeres**