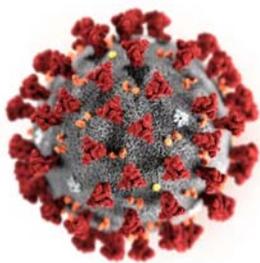


THE REEF SEEKER



REEF SEEKERS DIVE CO.
P.O. Box 634
Beverly Hills, CA 90213
(310) 652-4990
www.reefseekers.com
e-mail: kenkurtis@aol.com

September - 2020



SEPTEMBER TRAVEL

In a nutshell, it's still not looking too promising.

Indonesia has announced they will be closed to foreign tourism at least through the rest of 2020. (See separate story about how that affects our Murex trip.) The Cayman Islands has pushed their re-opening back at least until October 1. Even Hawaii has announced they will extend their mandatory 14-day arrival quarantine through the end of September.

Overall in the U.S., while things have improved, we're nowhere near out of the woods yet. We're still averaging 45,000 new cases every single day, and still roughly 1,000 people are dying in the U.S. from COVID every single day. Overall, U.S. deaths are approaching 190,000 and – with 4% of the world's population – we account for roughly 22% of the total fatalities. And while some might argue that those numbers skew high because of our initial response and that things are more under control now, for the two days prior to me

writing this, the U.S. accounted for 19% of the new deaths worldwide. So we've got work to do.

There is certainly hope with some new testing that's being approved including a Rapid Test from Abbott Labs that would work similarly to a pregnancy test in that you could do this either yourself or while waiting in a doctor's office. Availability will be key but once widely available, that could be a game-changer at least in knowing who is infected, which in turn should help us devise better plans to stop the spread.

And while there's hope for a vaccine, there are also mounting concerns that political pressure to get one before the November 3 election may result in one that's either ineffective or even dangerous. The fastest any infectious disease vaccine was able to be developed, tested, and approved was a timeline of four years for the mumps vaccine 1963-1967. At this point, we're less than a year into the COVID pandemic, and every day we learn something new about the disease, which means there's a lot we don't know and that assumptions we had about the disease last month may be triumphed by new knowledge gained next month. The path to a successful vaccine is not an easy, clear, or straight one.

In the meantime, do the best you

can to stay safe for yourself and others around you. Wear a mask at all times when outside, use hand sanitizer, wash your hands with soap & water anytime you can, and if you feel the least bit off with a cough, headache, or just feeling "blah," – things we wouldn't have worried about too much a year ago – play it safe and stay home for a day or two to see where it goes.

In the same way that we believed Smokey the Bear when he said, "Only YOU can prevent forest fires," we should listen to the medical experts who say, "Only YOU can stop the spread."

OCTOBER INDO NO-GO

Our Indonesia trip in October is the latest COVID casualty. We had a nice Zoom talk with Danny & Angelique Charlton and talked about how tough it would be, but since that discussion, the Indonesian government has announced the country is closed to foreign tourism through the end of 2020. They hope to use that time to restart domestic tourism within Indonesia but for now, our trip is off. We will schedule it for some time in 2021. Our "traditional" time is usually in July but that will obviously be dependent on how the worldwide COVID situation is playing out.



WE DOVE AVALON

We went over on Tuesday, August 25, out of San Pedro. Overall, very successful. Bear in mind this was mid-week, not weekend. By the same token, it's August, so people are still "staycationing" and you might find mid-week less crowded after Labor Day.

CATALINA EXPRESS – They consider 60% capacity as full which means everyone's got a place to sit. On the specific vessel we were on, lots of tables of 4 with only 1 or 2 people at most of them. Everyone is required to wear a mask and the Express folks were very good about explaining that you need to keep them on except while in the actual act of eating or drinking. In the San Pedro waiting area, people were certainly not all 6 feet apart but were mindful of creating some social distancing space. However, when exiting the boat in both Avalon and end-of-day in San Pedro, they packed in a bit tighter. So we just waited and were among the last ones off at both ends. It's important to know that if you feel the need to always maintain a 6-foot distance, it's not going to happen. If you're comfortable with everyone being masked and doing their best to create some distance and mindful of not invading personal space, then you'll be OK.

TAXI TO THE PARK - We always take taxis to and from the Park. They'll take up to 6 people but we chose to limit ourselves to no more than 3 to a cab. Drivers are wearing masks, cabs have the

front passenger seat blocked off, so it's two in the second row and one in the third row (gear all the way in the back). No issues.

AT THE UNDERWATER PARK - Again, bear in mind this was a weekday, not weekend. Set up in our usual/traditional spot on the ocean side of the seawall near the stairs. This allowed us to spread out a bit. One of our divers even went on the other side of the stairs. It was generally easy for us to avoid other divers and groups. I had set up a tab the day before with Catalina Divers Supply (310/510-0330 or do it on-line at their website) and when I walked to the truck, everything was ready and waiting. They've created an off-limits area around the truck so they've got space to work. There's an 8-foot table turned sideways that serves as check-in area and then they'll place the tanks and stuff you need at the edge of their work area. When it's time for airfills, take your tank over and CDS staff will direct you what to do. We all kept face-coverings on between dives. The Park was not very crowded - our group was 7, and there were maybe 30 other divers - and most people, but not all, wore face-coverings of some

sort. We kept ours on until it was time to gear up, timed our entries so we were moving when there was no one using the stairs, and when we came out, put face-coverings back on once we had dumped all of our gear and wiped our faces dry.

CONDITIONS – Generally good. Water temps were in the mid-60s with a thermocline below 50. Viz ranged from 30-50 feet. There was a strong current on our second dive but it was absent on our first and third dives. There was a huge school of Jack Mackerel to the east in the Pinnacles. And there were two large Giant Sea Bass (plus a sea lion) in the middle area around 60 feet deep. Videos of the Jack Mackerel and the GSBs can be found on the Reef Seekers website.

So overall, this was sometime we'd feel comfortable doing again. Since the Express boats were "full," I'd say our mid-week experience was pretty much the same as it would be weekend. Same with the taxi. However, the Park will likely be more crowded on weekends than it is weekdays so that may alter the weekend experience somewhat from what we had mid-week.

2021 DIVING VACATIONS

January 13-22 • Socorro

May 29 - June 5 • Bonaire

July (??) • Indonesia

The rest - a work in progress



COLLATERAL COVID DAMAGE

Would you believe: Your car battery.

With people not driving their cars as much and sometimes not at all for a while, AAA says that 40% of their calls now are for dead batteries. This is double what it was for the same timeframe a year ago.

Generally, if you drive your car at least once a week for about 20 minutes, this shouldn't be a problem. But if you've been doing a lot of work-from-home and your commute now is from the bedroom to the living room each morning (which kills "You wouldn't believe the traffic" as an excuse for starting late), give some thought to forcing yourself to do a small trip a couple of times a week. And here in L.A., get on the freeway so you can really rev the engine up, which should help replenish the charge on the battery.

The reason this can be a problem is that, especially with modern cars, even when the car isn't running, there's power going to computer & engine modules, power windows, etc. If driving the car a couple of times each month isn't practical, give some thought to a battery tender. They run \$25-50 and basically will help your battery hold its charge over times of inactivity.

Thanks to Loring Jahnke for tipping us off to this.

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

| DAY | DATE | BOAT/SITE | PLANNED DESTINATION | PRICE |
|------|---------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Sat. | Sept. 5 | Redondo (Vets) | Beach dive (single tank) | \$25 |
| Sun. | 20 | <i>Catalina Express</i> | Avalon U/W Park (3 dives) | \$150 |
| Thu. | 24 | Redondo (Vets) | ••• Night Dive ••• | \$25 |
| Sat. | Oct. 10 | <i>Catalina Express</i> | Avalon U/W Park (3 dives) | \$150 |
| Wed. | 14 | - CLASS - | - TABLES & COMPUTERS - | FREE!!! |
| Sat. | 31 | Redondo (Vets) | Navigation dive (single tank) | \$25 |
| Sat. | Nov. 7 | <i>Catalina Express</i> | Avalon U/W Park (3 dives) | \$150 |
| Thu. | 12 | Redondo (Vets) | ••• Night Dive ••• | \$25 |

UPCOMING LOCAL STUFF

So now that we're sort of slightly getting back into the swing of things, let me remind you of what's coming up.

We had a fun Fish ID class last week via Zoom. This was the first class we'd taught this way and it seemed to work out really well. I may also start doing some informal discussion-type things via Zoom, sort of like a dive club meeting but not quite that formal and maybe with more give-and-take than the formality of having a speaker. It's always fun to see what people think about various topics. Stuff like "Should you dive alone without an independent back-up air supply," "How far apart can buddies be and still be safe," "What do YOU the general diver think we as diving professionals should do when we see someone who we think is doing things that will end up badly," or even stuff as simple as "Split Fins or Blades: Which is better?"

Keep an eye on TWARS for the scheduling as they'll sort of be at my whim and would most likely be on a Monday or Tuesday evening. And because I've only got the free version of Zoom, there's a time limit so that if things get out of hand, the software will disconnect everyone just as you're

saying, "You don't know what the . . ."

We've got a beach dive planned for this Saturday at Redondo's Vets Park. Given that it's going to be scorchingly hot, maybe that's good timing. Of course, with the heat AND the first day of the Labor Day weekend, the beach will be crowded, especially because we usually start these things at 9AM. But give a call at 310/652-4990 if you're interested.

Our next Avalon trip is on the books for Sunday, September 20 but – as I mentioned in the previous page – we might again move it a day or two and go mid-week instead of on the weekend. The Express changes their sked starting September 8 and the 9AM from San Pedro (my boat of choice) doesn't run on Tuesdays or Thursdays. So we'd likely look at Monday, September 21. Let me know if you're interested in that as well.

Much as we all love diving and long to get back into the water, we're trying to do it as cautiously and safely as we can in this COVID world. Despite political promises of a vaccine "soon," I think this is going to be with us for a while and we'll have some long-term adjustments to make in terms of how we do things. So our plan at Reef Seekers is to watch what's happening, roll with the flow, and deal with it all as best we can.

A SOMBER ANIVERSARY

It was around 9AM on a lazy Monday, September 2, Labor Day morning last year, when my phone rang: “Did you hear about the Conception? It caught fire and sank. It’s all over the news.” It’s certainly a moment I’ll never forget.

This Wednesday marks the one-year anniversary of that tragedy. There may well be some “one year later” pieces that TV stations or newspapers will do. The investigative and legal wheels for this are still turning. But absent final reports, there are things we’ve learned and procedures that have changed in the last year.

One thing we learned, just a month later, was that this can happen again. On November 1, not quite a month later, the Red Sea Aggres-

sor burned and sank in a similar fashion – but with only one death and 17 survivors. And it made us stop and think whether what we initially thought was a unique one-off, was perhaps a larger issue.

Due to the circumstances of the Conception fire and the boat (and everything in it) sinking into sixty feet of water where it stayed for a number of days, we may never have definitive answers like you might with an airplane crash, where scattered debris gives clues to angle of impact, speed, and there are electronic trails with black-boxes, radar data, and the like that also lead you to answers.

But it seems the likely culprit in both boat fires was a defective lithium-ion battery (or some sort of battery), that ignited, exploded, and then got the inferno going. To that end, just about every boat I

know of now prohibits charging batteries overnight. That alone may be enough to make sure this never happens again. Many boats have also built special fire-proof boxes in which batteries must be charged.

Other areas of improvement include:

- * Making sure all fire alarms are wired together so if one goes off, they all go off
- * Fire pull stations
- * Relocation and widening of escape hatches
- * Video cameras to monitor all boat areas
- * Improved overnight watch frequency

The ultimate goal in all of this is to make sure it never happens again. So on Wednesday, maybe pause for a minute to remember those we lost, and hope that this is something we never repeat.

REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS

Carol Diana Adamic
Juha Pekka Ahopelto
Neal Baltz
Patricia Beitzinger
Vaidehi Campbell
Kendra Chan
Scott Chan
Adrian Dahood-Fritz
Sanjeer DeoPujari
Justin Dingham
Lisa Fiedler
Berenice Felipe
Kristy Finstad
Andrew Fritz
Daniel Garcia
Marybeth Guiney
Yuko Hatano

Yulia Krashennaya
Allie Kurtz
Xiang Lin
Caroline McLaughlin
Charles McIlvain
Kaustubh Nirmal
Angela Rose Quitasol
Evan Michel Quitasol
Michael Quitasol
Nicole Storm Quitasol
Steve Salika
Tia Salika-Adamic
Sumil Sungh Sandhu
Fernisa Sison
Ted Strom
Kristian Takvam
Wei Tan