

# THE REEF SEEKER



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## LOBSTERS TO DIE FOR

Every year I struggle with how to write this to get your attention so I'm going for morbid this year. Yes, it's that time of the year again when lobsters fear for their safety but sometimes divers disregard their own lives in the pursuit of the crustacean.

Lobster season begins at 12:01AM on Saturday, October 1. Many divers will plan on going out on boats Friday night so they can hit the water right on time, and then stay up all night doing two or three dives. Couple the excitement of lobster-hunting with a lack of sleep and - in some cases - a return to the water after some months of inactivity, and you've got a recipe for disaster. So while we wish you well in your lobster pursuits (although, truth be told, we're rooting for you to have many close encounters where you get the thrill of the chase and the lobster doesn't suffer the agony of defeat... or the agony of de boiling pot) we also hope you'll take in some common-sense safety practices as well.

Every year, we get at least one

fatality or close call on opening weekend. Many years, there are multiples. In 2014, there were FIVE fatalities in the first week of lobster-hunting. Each year for opening weekend, our Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber goes on alert of sorts, with a heightened awareness that they may be called into action. (They've also put out their own list of reminders, which you can access on their Facebook page.) Here are some suggestions we have . . .

Most importantly: **WATCH YOUR AIR** - Too often, divers get so engrossed in the hunt that they forget to watch their air and run out. If there's no buddy nearby (frequently the case), this then requires an emergency exhaling ascent, which is likely something you haven't practiced lately, which often results in an embolism, which can prove fatal. Just keep an eye on your air, don't run it too low (certainly not under 500psi), and don't get so focused on lobsters that you forget about you.

**LOBSTERS ADD WEIGHT** - I don't mean you're getting fat. but I mean if you're successful and you bag (literally) two or three lobsters on a dive, it's like adding weight to your belt. This will increase your air consumption, it will make you need to add air to your BC, and it will make your kick back to the shore or boat a little

harder. Be aware of all of that and pace yourself accordingly.

**TAKE TURNS** - Here's a novel concept: Dive with a buddy and take turns as to who's the hunter and who's the safety diver. On the first dive, one hunts and the other is spotter/safety for the entire dive. On the next dive, switch roles. Chances are you'll do just as well - maybe even better with two sets of eyes - and now you've got a second person on safety watch. This doesn't mean you can turn your brain off, but it hopefully means that mistakes that could lead to a fatality are less likely to occur.

**TAKE A NAP** - Hunting lobsters is tiring. Stayed fueled up by eating something between dives. Stay hydrated (since breathing dry air will dehydrate you). And take a nap between dives so you're somewhat more rested when you go back in at 4AM.

**LEAVE SOME FOR THE NEXT GUY/GAL** - Just because the daily bag limit is 7, it doesn't mean you have to take 7. Take what you can consume and leave some behind for another day.

**SKIP THE DIVE IF YOU'RE NOT 100%** - Lobster hunting is an arduous task and can be all-consuming. If you're not 100%, sit the dive out until you're really ready to go. And when you're doing a pre-dive self-evaluation, be

very honest with yourself. As I like to say, you never get hurt on a dive you don't make.

Good luck if you're a hunter and, as the Chamber said (quoting Sgt. Phil Esterhaus from Hill Street Blues): "Let's be careful out there."

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## COME DIVE AVALON WITH US

Saturday, October 22 is when we plan to descend (pun fully intended) upon Avalon to explore the Underwater Park and all that it has to offer. We generally get in three dives (with a break for lunch) on these outings and we set it up so that we've got tanks waiting for us at the Park, so you don't have to lug those with you.

There have also been great reports about diving the Park lately as the kelp seems to be making a comeback and there have been numerous sightings of Black Sea Bass. In fact, the last two times we've gone over, we've been treated to BSB encounters. And it's just a pleasant place to dive as well as it's a great way for you to get your gills wet again if it's been a while since you've been down, or if you'd just like to under the watchful eyes of an instructor-escort.

\$150 covers you for the Catalina Express (usually out of San Pedro), taxi to and from the Park, tank rental, the dives, and all the fun you can handle. (You're on your own dime for lunch and parking.) But it's a fun day and if you're interested in joining us, give us a call at 310/652-4990 to get yourself signed up.



## KEEP AN EYE ON MATTHEW

People sometimes forget that hurricane season in the Caribbean (and Pacific) technically extends through November 1, having started on June 1. But what many people don't realize is that the period from mid-August through mid-October is considered the most dangerous eight weeks, ac-

counting for over 75% of the tropical storm and hurricane days of the entire season. (In fact, this same period accounts for 96% of the hurricane days that are Category 3 or stronger.)

Currently, Hurricane Matthew is cruising through the Caribbean, having just passed north of the ABC Islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao) and looks like it's about to turn 90° and head due north, brushing along the side of Jamaica Monday, crossing over eastern Cuba, and then taking dead aim through the middle of the Bahamas mid-week.

Granted, the projected NOAA track you see in the graphic to the left can change, but if it holds true, the hurricane may affect some major diving areas, especially if it hits the Bahamas. It's a Category 3 hurricane right now, with maximum wind speeds of about 120mph. Matthew should lose some steam as it crosses over Cuba but even so, it has the potential to do a lot of damage.

If you've got a trip planned to this area, or the lower eastern US coast, in the next week or so, keep an eye on Hurricane Mathew and we will do the same.

## 2016-17 DIVING VACATIONS

**November 2-18 • Maldives**

**March 2017 • Bonaire (??)**

**June 2017 • Isla Mujeres (??)**

**July 7-21 • Yap Immersion #1**

## 2017 FOREIGN TRIPS

I'm in the midst of assembling the proposed schedule for next year. The big trip (Yap Immersion #1 & #2) we've already talked about and both weeks (10 days each actually) are filling nicely. And now what I'm trying to do is slot in some other destinations. Here's what I've got so far:

**BONAIRE** - We haven't been there since 2014 so it's high time we returned. In 2017, we're going to shoot for the end of March. Simply put, we LOVE diving Bonaire. The package we usually book with Buddy Dive gives us a dozen boat dives (2/day for 6 days) and then we've got the afternoons free for diving either from the numerous shore sites or even on Buddy Reef from the Buddy Dive dock. Plus, we'll be able to do our daily dusk dives (usually going in around 6PM) that we started a few years ago. We can often do this trip with as few as four but cap it at a max of 16. (Ideal size is 12.)

**ISLA MUJERES** - Even with our Week 1 weather issues, we had two outstanding weeks at Isla Mujeres (Mexico) this year. I've already had people asking about next year but I can't do it again in August due to the Yap trips (which take up all of July) and a total solar eclipse on August 21 that will have me in Nashville. But in talking with Jim Silver at Aqua Adventures Eco Diving, we're looking at June of 2017. The Whale Sharks should be abundant at that time (hopefully as many as we were getting this year), and we'll be able to dive the cenotes, the Cancun Underwater Museum, and the other sites that make this trip so unique. It'll also probably be a little cooler

## UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES

**Sat., Oct. 22 - Avalon - Underwater Park - \$150-ish**

**Wed., Oct. 26 - Vets Park - Night dive - FREE!!!**

**November - We're in the Maldives**

**December - TBA**

than it is in August, plus we won't have to be on hurricane watch. This trip will be limited to a max of 14 people and is perfect for non-divers, since the Whale Shark encounters are snorkel-only.

**GREAT WHITE SHARKS OF GUADALUPE** - I'm up in the air about this one. We had a little trouble filling the trip this year so I'm a bit gun-shy for 2017. By the same token, I've had a few people ask about it. But talk is cheap. I believe I could slot this in for either September or even October but I need to get five people to commit to lock down the dates. So if you're interested, let me know. It's a really great trip and you WILL have nature's Top Predator in your face.

**RAJA AMPAT** - What I'm working on putting together is a trip built around a liveaboard trip in Raja Ampat, which is the eastern edge of Indonesia. Getting there is a bit of a pain as you can't do it all in one hop, and either have to overnight in Bali or Manado. But that also gave me an idea of adding in a week at Murex in Manado on the front end (since we have to stop anyhow). And since we have to stop on the way back out, I figured we might as well do a couple of days in the Lembah Straits on the way back. Best of all, you can do all three, 1 & 2, 2 only, 1 only, or 2 & 3. Lots of

options. But filling the boat is key because that will end up being a fixed number of spots and I'll still have to pay for anything unsold. (There's a lot more flexibility with land trips.)

**SOCORRO** - We've done two trips there and if Indonesia doesn't pan out (or perhaps even if it does), I'm thinking of this as the backup plan. The caveat here will be that the trip will have to be in mid-to-late December as everything on Nautilus (my operator of choice) in November & early December is full. There's one possibility of a trip that is mid-month and ends Christmas Day, one that starts on Christmas Day, and even one that starts on New Year's Eve Day. So this is something to think about.

Other options for the Big Fall Trip (if Raja doesn't pan out) would be Galapagos or Cocos. And I realize a lot of you are saying right now, "Oh, I'd love to go there" which is fine but don't keep it to yourselves. Let me know about your desires. As I like to say lately my revised business plan is to help you spend your retirement/vacation money and get you the most bang for your buck. We can frequently get a trip "going" with as little as two or three people. You just need to let me know what captures your fancy, we start juggling schedules, and somehow, it all magically seems to come together.



## NICE DIVES AT VETS PARK

These are the magic words you always want to hear when you're about to do a beach dive: Lake Pacific. That means there are minimal or no waves, and likely very good visibility. And we've been very fortunate with our last two dives at Vets Park in Redondo to

get exactly those conditions.

Candidly, beach diving is NOT for everyone. It's definitely more work than a boat dive since you usually have to walk a ways with your gear on, you've got to get through the surf, and then you've got to kick out far enough to drop down to depth where you can start the dive. Even on a no-surf day, there's a bit of work involved.

But the rewards can be great too. For one thing, it's convenient. On the last dive we did, we got there at 7PM and had finished the 40-minute dive and even had time to chat with some other divers and we were still out of the parking lot a little after 9PM. And we saw cool stuff. More notable were the multitudes of Target Shrimp that were everywhere you looked. I

think if I say we saw at least a thousand, that wouldn't be an exaggeration. And they were both in the shallows as well as down in the canyon.

We also had a nice dive mid-month on a Sunday morning. Good visibility, warm water, and no waves, but not as much to see as normal and usually you see more at night anyhow because a lot of the creatures that hide during the day come out after the sun goes down. Days dives there can range from so-so to very good but night dives are almost always very good, plus we're approaching squid season.

So give some thought to diving Vets Park or any other beaches that are within your reach. It's a nice way to get in a dive without having to set aside an entire day.

# PICTURE PAGE - Non-lobster pix

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2016)



**Lovely anemone**



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**Two-spot octopus**



**Wary Cabezon**



**Scallop with a white "beard"**



**Juvy Treefish**