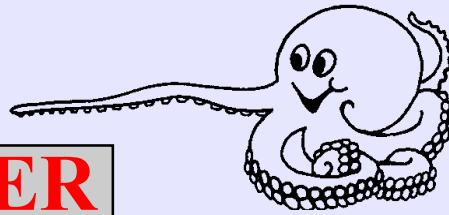


# THE REEF SEEKER



REEF SEEKERS DIVE CO.  
P.O. Box 634  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213  
Phone & text: (310) 652-4990  
web: [www.reefseekers.com](http://www.reefseekers.com)  
e-mail: [kenkurtis@aol.com](mailto:kenkurtis@aol.com)

November - 2023



## COME FLY WITH US – TRAVEL IN 2024

Over the years, Reef Seekers has become known for a number of things but one thing we excel at is organizing and running vacation dive trips. We've been doing this since 1988 so we've got a "little" experience that helps things run smoothly. We specialize in small-ish groups – sometimes as few as 4 to as many as 20 (but never mega-groups of 40 or 50 like some shops do) – to insure that you get some attention during the trip and to make sure that your vacation experience is maximized. (We're also happy to leave you alone as well, if that's what you want.)

We generally do 5-6 trips each year and we try to mix things up a bit in terms of destinations. Every year, we wrestle with the idea of whether we should go back to places that we've been to (especially because we've developed a relationship with the dive business and generally get better taken care of because of it) or should we

try some place new (so people don't say "Been there, done that"). It's an annual question and it has no right answer. We ran a yearly trip to the Sea of Cortez out of La Paz (on the beloved *Don Jose*) for 26 years straight so there's merit in going back to where you've been, especially when the diving's good. But there's also merit in finding new places to explore.

With all of that in mind, we've crafted a 2024 schedule that we're presenting here. For the coming year, we're doing all of our trips in the odd-numbered months (but skipping January because of some personal commitments). So there are five trips for us in 2024. They're all to places we've been before – but two places that we haven't visited in quite some time – and the other argument to make is that we wouldn't keep going back if we didn't like it previously.

We try to make our vacation packages as all-inclusive as possible. Obviously, they include the diving and sometimes they also include nitrox. Many of them include meals. They all include a generous crew/staff tip (which also helps us get good service) and usually include an overnight hotel when needed. They do NOT include airfare but we are happy to tell you what the recommended flights are and to help you book those on your own. (Airfare book-

ing has become so tricky nowadays that this is easier for us and better for you.) But basically, you get yourself to the airport and we'll take it from there.

Also bear in mind – a little humble-bragging here – that all of our trips this year filled up and some of our 2024 trips are almost full. So if there's something that catches your eye, let us know sooner rather than later that you're interested so we can at least have you on our radar and you don't get shut out of a trip you'd like to do.

Here's the proposed plan for 2024 (dates listed include the travel time as well). Pricing is based on double-occupancy but single supplement is sometimes available (just ask):

### **MARCH 18-22 – SAN IGNACIO LAGOON - \$3,195**

We went there in 2023 and we're going again. (We already have 9 people committed for this trip and just picked up a few more spots.) This is NOT A DIVE TRIP so it's also perfect for the non-diving partner. But this is the place you go when you want to hug a Gray Whale. They come down to San Ignacio every winter. We'll be going out in pangas to observe them and hopefully have one of the "friendlies" come over and interact with us. On our trip this year, every single person in our group had at least one physical

contact with a whale. (It was waaaay cool.) We're doing this through Nautilus Adventures and Baja Expeditions (the same folks who ran our *Don Jose* trips) and we'll be in their camp in their "glamping" tents. We should get eight whale forays over the four days we're there. This is a great trip if you've got a still or video camera as you'll get some incredible photo opportunities. Please note that while this trip doesn't include airfare down to Cabo San Lucas, it DOES include the private small plane ride from Cabo to San Ignacio Lagoon and then back to Cabo when the trip is over.

**MAY 17-25 – ROATAN -  
\$2,950 - \$3,400**

We were last in Roatan five years ago so it's time we went back. We will once again stay at Anthony's Key. They're not only the largest dive operator on Roatan, but it seems like they've completed a full reconstruction and refurbishing of a lot of their restaurant and dock facilities (some of which they were just starting when we were last there) which should make an already-excellent operation even better. Anthony's is an all-inclusive resort so this package includes three boat dives daily, three meals daily and – new for this year – two night dives as well. So it's up to 20 boat dives over the course of a week and there's beach diving too. This is a great trip for someone who hasn't done many (or any) dive vacations before but it's also wonderful for the seasoned pro. We usually get a boat just for our group so we can schedule the dives as we wish. And since each dive is a 1-tank dive and then you come back to the resort (dives sites are generally no more than 10 minutes away) – you can tailor the daily

dive sked to fit whatever your own preferences are. Anthony's is really a quite charming operation with really good food, nice diving, and friendly people.

**JULY 8-19 – MUREX,  
MANADO, INDONESIA -  
\$3,495 - \$3,920**

We're visiting two of our absolute favorites in 2024, and this is one of them. We've had a phenomenal relationship with Murex since 2000 (this is where I got my "Opa Gila" nickname). We know them and they know us and that makes for an amazingly smooth trip with some little touches for our groups just because of who we are and how often we've been there. On top of that, the diving is varied and spectacular. There are some 2,500 species of fish found in this part of the world – it's thought that life in the ocean may have started in the Banda Sea which abuts Manado – and healthy corals as well. One of the great things about diving here is that we have a choice of vertical walls, sloping reefs, or "muck" dives. The last one is where the most interesting creatures in the world – like Pygmy Seahorses, Flamboyant Cuttlefish, Ghost Pipefish, Blue-ringed octopuses, and more – hide and live. We'll do

a day trip by boat to dive Banka Island (Murex has a resort there as well) for the amazing soft corals that thrive in the current. And we'll do a single-day trip to the Lembeh Straits, considered the muck-diving Capital of the World. This trip truly has something for everyone. We've already got 13 people committed and only have space for a few more, so if this one's in your wheelhouse, get hold of us ASAP. This is definitely a destination that should be on your bucket list.

**SEPTEMBER 5-18 (tentative)  
– YAP - \$TBA  
(most likely \$3,500 - \$4,500)**

This is our other absolute favorite spot to go and Manta Ray Bay is an absolute favorite dive-dedicated resort to stay at. We can't say enough good things about Yap and Manta Ray Bay. (In my mind, it's hard to separate the two.) You really feel like you're in a remote location, but everyone speaks English, and the diving is amazing. Where else in the world can you have Manta Rays gliding over your head in the morning, watch sharks shred frozen bait in the afternoon, and then watch the daily mating of Mandarinfish as the sun sets? You can do all of that in a single day in Yap. There are some spectacular

**2024 DIVING VACATIONS**

**March 18-22 • San Ignacio**

**May 17-25 • Roatan**

**July 8-19 • Indonesia**

**September 5-18 (tent.) • Yap**

reefs and you always want to be looking out in the blue for large animal encounters. This year, we were treated to a huge school of Eagle Rays gliding by in formation. Daily breakfast is included on these trips, as is lunch (usually eaten on the boat between dives 2 and 3), and we're on our own for dinner. Three dives per day is the normal routine and because of the way Yap is laid out, you can almost always find calm places to dive. (As some of you know, we had lousy weather this past year but it didn't affect our ability to dive.) And speaking of Manta Rays, Yap is well-known for having a few Manta cleaning stations where you can sit transfixed as these gentle giants hang almost motionless in the mild current while small fish give them the marine equivalent of a mani-pedi. Yap is truly a magical place and we are always eager to return.

**NOVEMBER 1-11 – PALAU  
ON THE *AGGRESSOR* -  
\$4,450**

Palau is yet another wonderful world-class destination that's been off of our radar for too long. In fact, we haven't been there since 2016. Every time we've done Palau previously, we've always done it on the *Aggressor* and that's our plan this time too. (There are now two *Aggressor*, the *Palau Aggressor II* and the *Rock Island Aggressor* and they're identical vessels.) The nice thing about doing this from a liveaboard rather than using day boats is that the mothership keeps you close to the dive sites and you don't have to make long trips in small boats each day to go explore. And if you want to sit out a dive, no big deal AND you've got a marvelous floating hotel where you can relax. There are

**UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES**

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	Nov. 1	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	<b>35</b>
Wed.	8	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	<b>175</b>
Sat.	18	Redondo/Vets	Navigation Made Easy	<b>35</b>
Thu.	30	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	<b>35</b>
Wed.	Dec. 6	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox ---	<b>95</b>
Sat.	16	Redondo/Vets	Taming Surf Entries	<b>35</b>
Wed.	20	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	<b>175</b>

really too many dive sites in Palau to hit them all on one trip but we'll plan on doing the best of what Mother Nature has to offer. These might include Blue Corner, German Channel, Big Drop-Off, Ulong Channel, the Helmet Wreck, Peleliu Express, and many more. We usually hit the more famous sites like Blue Corner and German Channel multiple times over the course of the week. We generally get in four dives each day with a couple of night dives as well. As of this writing, Jellyfish Lake, usually the last dive of the trip, is not on the schedule but that might change by the time we get there late next year. But Palau is one of those you've-got-to-go there spots and Reef Seekers is the one to help you experience it to the fullest.

So that's the plan for 2024. See what floats your boat and then either give us a call or shoot us an email to get signed up. For most of the trips, a \$1,000 deposit will hold your spot (\$750 for San Ignacio). We'll have a payment plan for the months leading up to the trip. Also be aware that prices quoted are check/cash/Venmo/Zelle. We're happy to take credit cards but those are 4% higher to offset the processing fees.

You deserve a fabulous trip, especially as the world opens up post-COVID. And we will be honored if/when you choose to do that vacation dive with Reef Seekers.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE**

Whether you travel with us, with someone else, or on your own, travel insurance is always a good idea. You'll find that some policies include things like payment for lost or delayed baggage and may even include some sort of medical insurance. (We still recommend you carry maximum DAN Dive Insurance regardless. You can never have too much coverage.) Here's a recent instance where the travel insurance was quite helpful.

A fully-paid trip was cancelled due to a tour operator issue, but the operator would only issue travel vouchers with an expiration date. The couple didn't think they'd be able to re-sched and use the vouchers. The insurance company has said that they won't reimburse them now, because they still have valid vouchers, but once the vouchers expire and aren't used, they'll resubmit their claim and get their money back.

It's easy to get bogged down in figuring what policy to get. A great resource to have is this website: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com). They act as a clearinghouse for many policies and you can easily shop around to find one that's right for you and which fits your budget. Depending on the coverage you get, trip insurance will likely be 5-15% of the overall trip cost.



## **UNITED CHANGES BOARDING POLICY**

Woe to those in Group 3 and above on United Airlines.

United has announced a change in their boarding policies that will impact anyone in groups 3, 4, 5, or 6. (Groups 1 and 2 will not be affected.) But for those other groups, they will now board using the “WILMA” system, which stands for Window/Middle/Aisle. Window seats board first, then middle seats, and finally all the aisle seats. (It’s also known as Inside-Out.)

One of the concerns is that by the time the aisle people board, there won’t be any overhead storage space left. Some consumer groups

are calling on United to strictly enforce the carry-on rule which limits you to one in the overhead and one under your seat.

It’s unclear from what I’ve read if they’re going to do Group 3 in this manner, then Group 4, and Groups 5 & 6, or if they’re combining 3-6 and simply doing all the windows then all the middles and then all the aisles.

United says the new system saves about 2 minutes per flight which doesn’t sound like much until you realize that it cascades through the entire system as a plane progresses through its day. So it’s possible you could have picked up as much as an hour or two by the end of the day, since even a 2-minute delay leaving the gate can trigger some

other ground delays which further delays the flight from leaving.

If you’re flying United and you’re not Group 1 or Group 2, be forewarned. And if this has affected you, drop us a note and tell us what you thought of the new system.

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## **DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME ENDS SUNDAY**

Remember to “fall back” when you go to bed Saturday evening and roll your clocks back one hour as we resume Standard Time at 2AM Sunday morning (which then becomes 1AM). Especially if you’re on a dive boat Sunday, don’t forget to reset your clocks.

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## **PICTURE PAGE - Big animals**

*(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2023)*



**Whale Shark**  
*(Isla Mujeres)*



P.O. Box 634  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

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**Gray Reef Shark**  
*(Yap)*



**Manta Ray**  
*(Maldives)*



**Giant Sea Bass**  
*(Avalon Underwater Park)*



**Manatee**  
*(Crystal River, Florida)*