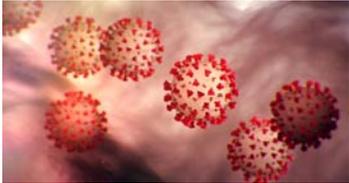


THE REEF SEEKER



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December - 2020



DIVING & COVID RESTRICTIONS

To quote Oliver Hardy: “Well, here’s another nice mess you’ve gotten me into!”

The special L.A. County COVID order went into effect today and lasts at least until December 20. I actually called the L.A. County Department of Public Health today to try to get some guidance and clarification and although they said they’d call me back, they did not. So what follows is my interpretation of things.

The easy part is that non-essential businesses – and no matter how special WE think diving is, that’s the category into which we fall – can operate, but at 20% capacity. Hal Wells of Hollywood Divers made a post pointing out that this means for them no more than 4 customers at any given time. (Of course for some stores, 4 customers at once would qualify as a miracle.) So the customer count is going to be limited by whatever the total capacity of the store is and then take 20% of that.

Pools are open for swimming but limited to a single person per lane.

But how will that affect us if we’re teaching underwater? Obviously, from an instructional standpoint, you have to be close enough to be able to respond to a critical situation, even in a pool, but does that violate any of the guidelines, even though there’s no evidence to indicate that COVID transmission can be water-borne.

More complicated will be when we try to take people diving in the ocean. The new regs specifically prohibit “gatherings” with anyone outside of your household. But if that’s how I have to conduct business, isn’t that the same – and in fact safer because it’s outside – as having them in the store?

If I can conduct business outdoors, am I still under the 20% rule for non-essential businesses, or do I now fall under the 50% capacity rule for “fitness centers operating outdoors.” (We may not strictly be a fitness center but try trudging up the stairs to the Vets parking lot with a 40-pound tank on your back, a 20-pound weightbelt on your waist, while wearing a wetsuit, and tell me that’s not a workout.)

And to continue with the beach issue, if I’m teaching but only have one student, it would seem that’s OK but if I’m not teaching and just wanted to do a “fun” dive with that same individual, and it’s someone I don’t live with, THAT is now

prohibited even though the risk of infection is exactly the same.

Dive boats pose yet another issue. If they’re a non-essential business, they have to operate at 20%. For a large boat that takes 30 divers, that means no more than 6. For a 6-pack, that means no more than 1. Hard to stay in business that way.

And the big question: Who’s going to enforce all of this? I could see lifeguards taking a beach enforcement role since that’s an area they specifically look out for. But what about a parking lot? What about over at the Avalon Underwater Park? Will the Sheriffs or Baywatch be rolling by to see who’s doing what with whom?

And lest you be thinking this is mainly an old person’s disease, think again. The actual numbers are available on-line but the #1-affected age group in terms of getting sick is 30-49 (32%), followed by 18-29 (24%), and then 50-64 (18%). That’s 56% 18-49 and 74% when expanded to 18-64. That’s why there’s a concern that if you’re under 50 and you get infected, maybe your symptoms are mild, but then you pass it on to someone older and more susceptible.

The intent of all of this is noble: We HAVE to get a handle on things, not only because too many people have died from this insidi-

ous disease, but because our hospitals are right now at the breaking point and if we run out of regular hospital beds let alone specialized ICU beds, look for the death toll to suddenly sky-rocket.

We're in this together as both a diving community and overall human community. The sooner we start taking more seriously how easily this thing spreads, the sooner we can see a path back to normalcy. As one doctor put it, "The virus can't move on its own. WE move it." I'm all for being a mover and a shaker, but not in this context. Wear a mask. Social distance. Wash your hands. Beat COVID.



OUR TRAVEL PLANS FOR 2021

I think the best line I've heard about this year is, "Buying a calendar for 2020 was a big waste of money."

This is the time of the year when I plan out the following year and to say it's a challenge is an understatement. The allure of the various vaccines that are being touted gives us all hope of travelling again, but the availability timing is anyone's guess. Even when you discount anti-vaxxers who won't take this under any circumstances, just in the U.S. alone you're looking at probably 200-250 million people needing the vaccine. Worldwide, the numbers are even more astounding.

So, since I don't like taking your

money and then have to cancel/postpone a trip and be told that it's credit-only no-refunds, the only things I have on the 2021 books right now are our Socorro trip in six weeks (which is full) and the Bonaire trip May 28 - June 5, which is our twice-postponed 2020 trip where we've already sent in deposits so don't want to lose the credit (and have space available).

This doesn't mean we won't be travelling. It just means I'd like a better guarantee that we can get to where we want to go. I also anticipate/hope that once travel can resume, the floodgates will open and that we'll be able to find some pretty good deals not only at the resorts, but on airfares as well, as airlines try to start recouping their tremendous financial losses.

We've been staying in touch with man of our favorite places like Manta Ray Bay in Yap, Murex in Indonesia, the *Manthiri* in the Maldives, and Buddy Dive in Bonaire. They're all eager to welcome us back and we're eager to go again. So sit tight (its healthier to stay at home anyhow), be patient, and we'll be flying the friendly COVID-free skies again sometime soon.

LOCAL STUFF IN 2021

We're also working on the sked for local dives and classes as well for the coming year. In general terms, it'll look a lot like what we did (or planned to do) in 2020. There will be a combination of Avalon day trips and single-dive Redondo trips, along with a smattering of on-line classes. Some changes/highlights for 2021:

- Avalon trips will generally be on Wednesday to take advantage of the uncrowded nature of mid-week visits
- Avalon trips are going up by \$10 to cover increased *Express*, taxi, and air costs
- Squid and night dives will be Thursdays at Redondo
- On-line classes (Photo, Fish ID, Nitrox, and Tables & Computers) will be Wednesday evenings starting at 7PM
- All the on-line classes will be via Zoom
- Beach and Navigation dives will be Saturdays at Redondo 9AM-Noon

The other thing to remember is that this sked is flexible and subject to change, especially if we can

2021 DIVING VACATIONS

January 13-22 • Socorro

May 29 - June 5 • Bonaire

July (??) • Indonesia

August (??) • Isla Mujeres

resume foreign travel and start adding those trips back in. The other thing that might change would be Avalon trips, which could move to either Monday or Friday, depending on the *Express* schedule. We generally prefer to leave out of San Pedro, which has a more limited sked than Long Beach, especially in “off-season” months.

You can get a little bit of a sneak peek at the sked for next year in the upper right-hand corner of this page, as I’ve listed the plan through the end of March. I will publish the full 2021 sked in January which will include local trips, local classes, special events (Avalon Cleanup, Divers Day, Chamber Day, Scuba Show), and the two vacation trips have on the books. I’ll also get it up on the website in a week or so and you’ll be able to find it on the home page as “2021 Local Dive & Class Schedule.”



“DIVE” THE NASA NEUTRAL BOUYANCY LAB ON DECEMBER 8

Well . . . a virtual dive to some degree.

But on this date, we’re going to have a guest speaker in the person of Dr. Robert Sanders, not only a longtime friend, but also the Medical Director for said NASA Neutral Buoyancy Lab where the astronauts train for various missions. The NBL is a huge pool (202 feet long, 102 feet wide, 40 feet deep)

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	Dec. 2	- CLASS -	- FISH ID -	\$25
Sun.	6	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	10	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	12	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	Jan. 7	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Wed.	27	--- CLASS ---	TABLES & COMPUTERS	FREE
Sat.	30	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Wed.	Feb. 3	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$160
Thu.	11	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Wed.	24	--- CLASS ---	PHOTO WORKSHOP	\$25
Wed.	Mar. 17	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$160
Thu.	25	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE
Sat.	27	Redondo (Vets)	Navigation (single dive)	\$25

that has mockups of various spacecraft and, because everything’s underwater, zero-G conditions can be simulated to get the spacepeople used to working in those conditions for upcoming missions.

We’re going to do this all through Zoom and I will be sending out the link as we get closer to the actual event. I haven’t asked Bob how long he’ll talk but I’m guessing 45 minutes or so and we’ll make time to take questions as well.

Bob’s been a well-travelled guy, serving some time as a Chamber Volunteer and Supervisor, spent four years as a Dive Safety Officer in the Antarctic, worked with the University of Hawaii hyperbarics unit, and has worked with NASA since 2014.

This promises to be a fun and interesting talk and I hope you’ll be able to join us.

ZOOM SEEKERS 2021

I was generally pleased with the turnout that we had last month for our impromptu chat about nothing in particular. And, especially since Bob Sanders was on the call and planted the idea of giving the Neutral Buoyancy Lab talk, I’m look-

ing forward to this with great anticipation as well.

I’ve mentioned previously that one of the benefits of the pandemic has been that dive club meetings have gone virtual and that opens up a wide range of speaking possibilities since a club is now no longer limited to people convenient to the geographic area.

So what we’re going to do and will continue to do as long as you all show some level of collective interest, is host monthly meetings with various guest speakers via Zoom which I’m collectively calling “Zoom Seekers.” Except for January (which will be on the 5th), the meetings will take place on the second Tuesday of each month, and will generally run 7:30-9PM. (Bob’s chat on 12/5 is right now scheduled to start at 7PM.)

I will spend the next few weeks trying to get hold of some of my friends throughout the dive industry and see who I can rope into chatting. (The downside of all of this is that if there are times when I can’t get someone or they back out at the last minute, you may get stuck with me.) But we’ll give this a whirl and see how things work out. Hopefully you can make plans to join us for some of them.

VIRTUAL EVENTS IN 2021

The COVID restrictions will continue to affect many of the dive events on the calendar. Here's the status of the big four:

AVALON CLEANUP – Details are still being worked out but this will be a virtual event this year with registered divers encouraged to do local beach trash cleanups over an extended period of time, enter their trash on our website which will then qualify them for prizes, and then everyone should tune in on Saturday, February 20, as we will live-stream the awards ceremony.

DIVERS DAY – Planned as always at the Aquarium of the Pa-

cific for Saturday, March 13, but unclear as to what form it will take. It will all be dependent on how much of the Aquarium is open to the general public and at what capacity. Might involve a combination of in-person activities and live-streamed events.

CHAMBER DAY – We will likely follow the general all-virtual format that we had last year. USC is still prohibiting in-person visits to the Wrigley Marine Center and it's unclear if that restriction will be lifted by May 5. It's also unclear as to whether or not the Aquarium will be available for Chamber Eve but even if it is, it would most likely be under very strict social distancing guidelines which would limit capacity (perhaps under 100) to the point that it

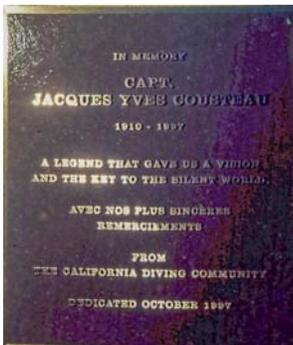
wouldn't make any sense. So we will go all-virtual as we did last year and will be releasing specifics after the first of the year.

SCUBA SHOW – It's scheduled for May 22-23 but, like Chamber Day, will likely still have to contend with social distancing and capacity limitations that may make it impractical to do as a live event. However, the live-stream version last year of all the various presentations seemed to be a big hit, so that may be the route the event takes again in 2021.

As always, we'll let you know what we know when we know it.



PICTURE PAGE - New Cousteau Plaque



Original plaque from 1997

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2020)



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How it looked after 23 years underwater



The final design, modeled after the original



The finished product mounted over the original



The installation crew from Signature U/W Divers