

# THE REEF SEEKER



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## **SAD ENDING FOR SOLMAR V**

The Solmar V saga has come to an end and it's not a good one.

Solmar has been running trips in Mexico for years and years. They used to regularly do trips into the Sea of Cortez, went to Guadalupe (when that was open for Great White Sharks), and were down in Socorro as well. Although we never booked the boat (for a number of reasons), many people we know had done trips with them and had a good time. But something changed in November.

The original cover story was that a diver had died due to an unspecified medical condition on a Socorro trip and that the incident upset not only the crew but also the management and even the investors in the boat. And because of this, they cancelled their next trip (also Socorro) and then one or two after that with little or no notice to the people who had paid to go.

To those of us who do this for a living, something seemed amiss

with this explanation. We all know that while diving is a relatively safe sport overall, when things go wrong, they can quickly go horribly wrong. And many times, despite the best efforts of the professionals on the scene, the outcome is not good. And while this is upsetting, it's also a well-known hazard of working in the diving industry.

So when the initial reason of "our crew is upset" was floated, the first thought was "Give them time off and bring in a replacement crew." And even if the crew was upset – certainly understandable – why would that be impacting the Solmar management and why on earth would it be affecting their investors? Something didn't seem right.

As the calendar turned to December, Solmar kept cancelling trips. And as word spread about what was going on, people tried to get hold of Solmar and got no response. E-mails weren't answered and phones message left didn't get a return call. Even worse, they were still accepting payments for future trips through their website. But they were no longer taking credit card payments and asked for wire transfers. That also raised some red flags since wire transfers are much harder to cancel or retrieve when there's a problem. As the year drew to a close, the situation

became clearer and it seems there were a number of things going on.

First, it was discovered that the boat had been moved from Cabo to Mazatlan. That's not where you'd put a boat if you were running Socorro trips. Then it became known that the boat had been sold to new owners a few months earlier. However, the previous management company (Pacific Fleet) would still be running the boat under the new ownership. But then the final nail in the coffin became known as it appears that the old ownership hadn't paid Socorro park fees to the Mexican government for some time and the new owners couldn't afford to cover that cost, which was said to be somewhere in excess of \$200,000.

So in mid-January, despite having repeatedly assured everyone that the issue would be resolved, Pacific Fleet announced that Solmar would cease operations. They shut down their website entirely.

Some people who had trip insurance have been able to cover at least some of what they lost. Others have not been so fortunate. And it seems like a lot of people are going to not be able to recover whatever they paid for their trip.

We always recommend you get trip insurance for any big trip you do. It's relatively inexpensive (usually 5-15% of the trip cost) and

should cover most problems. I don't know why some people seem to be having trouble collecting in this instance, but it might have something to do with the specific wording of whatever policy they bought.

The sad part of all of this is that Solmar had a solid reputation before all of this went down. So it's understandable that a lot of people who have lost money, many of them repeat Solmar customers, feel betrayed. I'm not sure that there's any advice to give as to how to avoid this in the future other than to say keep communicating with whoever you've booked a trip with and if something doesn't feel right, try to get some answers. As with most problems in life, once someone stops explaining what's going on, or says things like "We can't tell you now but we're working on it," that should be a red flag. And it's not a question of "buyer beware" since Solmar had a solid reputation right up to this point. But now at least you know what the entire story is.



### **REDONDO SQUID**

It seems the squid are back at Vets Park in Redondo. Squid season generally runs from mid-December through March. And "season" may be too generous a term since it's not necessarily predictable. But we generally know that once we

start seeing some squid coming in, we're likely to see more and more.

The thing to understand about a squid run – and to be clear, this means they're coming in to mate – is that it's the end of their life cycle, which is generally a year or less. Mating is the last thing they do in their short lives so when you see live squid mating, you'll also likely see other predators in the vicinity, waiting to feast on the dying squid. These predators can include Bat Rays, Sea Lions, crabs, and even some sharks. So a lot of times when there are squid, there will be other marine life in the area as well.

And that's what can make a squid dive spooky because the mating always takes place at night. And while the predators will generally hang at the edges of the activity and wait for the squid to finish mating (I assume because they're easier prey then), it's also not uncommon to be in the middle of the squid, your dive light or video lights being the only source of illumination and attracting the squid to your light, and out of the darkness, a sea lion suddenly swoops in to grab a snack. That'll make your heart race.

If you're not comfortable doing this at night, you can certainly do this as a daytime dive. You'll see the egg clusters that have been left behind – the clusters are off-white, roughly the length of the index finger, and each one contains many eggs – arranged in somewhat circular patches.

Specifically at Redondo, they're going to be in the 60-90 foot depth range. Kick out from either set of stairs, you'll hit the shoulder of the canyon around 30-35 feet, follow the slope on down until it starts to level off, and the egg clusters should be there in front of you. You may have to swim a bit left or right to find the first one but once you find one, you'll generally start finding more. If it's nighttime and the squid are active, they'll be attracted to your lights. It's not uncommon for there to be many, many, many squid.

No matter when you do it or how you do it, it's a very unique and interesting dive and one that I hope you'll think about trying. From our standpoint, the next scheduled Reef Seekers escorted squid dive is February 26. Fingers crossed conditions are good and the timing is right.

### **2026-2027 DIVING VACATIONS**

**March 9-22, 2026 • Yap**

**July 1-14, 2026 • Indonesia**

**Sept. 2026 • Philippines**

**August, 2027 • Eclipse & dive**

## OUR 2027 ECLIPSE TRIP (UPDATE)

I realize that after jarring you with the tale of the Solmar, pitching you on a big foreign trip may seem a little discombobulated, but here goes anyhow.

As many of you know, I like to chase total solar eclipses. And the next big one will be a doozy, on August 2, 2027, as it cuts through Africa and specifically Luxor, Egypt, with a length of totality of roughly six-and-a-half minutes, which is pretty much as long as it can possibly get.

Here's what I've got in mind so far. Also remember this is still in the early planning stages so some of the specifics may change. And I've got to build this trip backwards from the eclipse date. In other words, we HAVE to be in Luxor on August 2 so until I get that nailed down (I'm currently talking with two different vendors), I can't really secure anything else.

The other thing to understand is that this trip overall will have four or five individual components. You don't have to do the entire trip. I'll set things up so you could join or leave at any given point. And because a total solar eclipse is such a spectacular thing to experience, I'm thinking Luxor as the end of the trip so we finish on that high note. Everything else will come earlier.

The other thing that's intrigued me is whether we fly east or west from LAX. If we were just going to Egypt, you'd fly east (through Frankfurt, London, Paris, or other cities) and then come home. But if we do the diving ahead of time and

### UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED ACTIVITY	\$\$\$
Wed.	Feb. 4	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI NITROX ---	75
Wed.	11	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon UW Park	180
Thu.	26	Veterans Park	• • • Squid Dive (night) • • •	FREE!!!
Sat.	28	Veterans Park	Beach Diving Made Easy	25
Wed.	Mar. 25	--- CLASS ---	--- FISH I.D. MADE EASY ---	25
Sat.	Apr. 4	Veterans Park	Navigation Made Easy	25
Wed.	8	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon UW Park	180
Thu.	23	Veterans Park	• • • Night Dive • • •	25

do it in the Indo-Pacific area, it makes more sense to leave LAX and fly west, and then continue west to Egypt, and then head west one more time out of Egypt to come home. And if we do it that way, it becomes a truly around-the-world trip (which has a novel level of appeal to me).

Realize I don't have pricing or dates or anything like that. This is just a rough idea. And, since most places are Saturday-Saturday, I believe we'll likely need to build in some not-diving travel days so we can arrive at various places on time. But here's what I'm thinking at the moment. (And yes, it won't be cheap.)

I think I'd like to start by diving the Solomon Islands for a week or so. It's a place we haven't been and I've always heard good things. Looks like you fly through either Nadi (Fiji) or Brisbane (Australia) to get there.

After the Solomons, I'm thinking it would be nice to dive the Seychelles. That's another place we haven't been and also another place where I've heard good things. Looks like we'd have to go through Brisbane, Singapore, or Dubai to get there.

After the Seychelles, we'll head to Egypt. The pyramids are in Cairo, not Luxor, but you've got to fly through Cairo to get to Luxor, so it

makes sense to spend a few days in Cairo seeing the major pyramids as well as the new Grand Egyptian Museum (with King Tut's mask). From there, we'll fly down to Luxor (only an hour by air) and arrive a day or two before the eclipse so we can tour some of the fabulous temples there.

On eclipse day (August 2), we won't have any tours planned. The partial phase of the eclipse starts just before Noon local time, totality is around 1PM, and the partial phase ends around 2:30PM. We'll devote the entire day to marveling at the wonder of the eclipse. We'll likely spend one more day in Luxor and leave on August 4, because I think it'll be easier to get flights by waiting an extra day. And it looks like we have to go through Cairo where there are then multiple options to get back to LAX.

Whew!!! So that's the pie-in-the-sky plan. Because either the Solomons or the Seychelles or both may be on a liveaboard, that's going to determine the max number of people we can take. I'm guessing it will be 15-20 people. But like I said, I need to nail down the Luxor stuff first and then build everything else from there. It'll be complex, but fun. And definitely a trip-of-a-lifetime (with an eclipse to boot)!!!

If you've got questions or suggestions, feel free to e-mail or call.

## DIVE SAFETY

You've heard me say this before: "You never get hurt on a dive you don't make."

There was a fatality at the Avalon Underwater Park last weekend. The buddy reports a "medical emergency" underwater. I see this often when reading accident reports. It makes you wonder if something was going on before the dive started that, had the victim decided not to dive because of it, they might still be around. There's certainly no way to know for sure.

But I often know of people diving when the mental process isn't, "Let's go!" but more like, "Yeah, I think I'll be OK." When the latter is the way you feel about the dive, maybe it would be a good idea not

to do the dive in the first place.

And if you ARE going to dive, at least let your dive buddy know that something might be a little bit off. There's no question, especially once you get out of a classroom setting, that dive buddies don't really dive shoulder-to-shoulder (or even at arm's length) as they've been taught. Amongst professionals, the basic thought is that as visibility increases, so does the distance between buddies.

But it's also important to remember that, if something goes wrong, you'd like to be able to offer immediate assistance. And anytime you're further away than you can reach, "immediate" takes on a different meaning.

So if you're feeling a bit off, let your buddy know. Or simply don't

do the dive. Overall, diving is a very safe sport with a low accident rate. But, when things go wrong, we're in a life-threatening environment where seconds may make a difference between life and death. Play it safe so you'll be around to dive another day.

## AVALON CLEANUP

It's happening Saturday, February 21, and consists of a single dive either in the harbor, where divers pick up whatever trash they can find. The event usually attracts a couple of hundred divers. Funds raised are evenly split between "Beautify the Underwater Park" and our hyperbaric Chamber. To sign up, go to the website <https://www.avalonharborcleanup.org/>.

## PICTURE PAGE - Cleanups Past

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2026)



**Briefing time**



**Some of the finds**



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**Starting the hunt for treasure**



**She's always in her spot**



**Colorful divers**