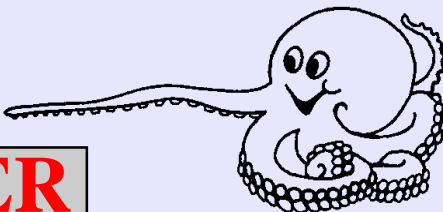


THE REEF SEEKER



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THE SHANGHAI AQUARIUM(S)

As many of you know, I recently spent a week in Shanghai, China, that included an opportunity to dive in the Shanghai Aquarium. I assumed this was to be in their relatively-new hi-tech aquarium downtown. But who knew there could be TWO aquariums in Shanghai . . . ???

We thought we were going to dive in the Shanghai Ocean Aquarium (more on that in a minute) and were quite surprised to find ourselves on the opposite side of town, in the pouring rain, traipsing across a muddy field to get to the back entrance of Changfeng Ocean World which opened in 1999 and was Shanghai's FIRST aquarium.

One unusual aspect of the place is that most of it - except for the two separate entrance and exit buildings - is actually located beneath a man-made lake in the middle of Changfeng Park. So this is one aquarium that's underwater no matter where you are once inside.

The place houses a collection of fresh-water animals and salt-wa-

ter ones as well, but our main goal was to dive in their shark tank, which we'd set up through Leigh Chan, the owner of Big-Blue Scuba Diving International in Shanghai, one of six or seven dive shops in the city, but the only one who speaks decent English.

Leigh gave us a tour of the place and we'd timed our visit to coincide with their feed of the animals in the shark exhibit. That in and of itself was pretty interesting as they had three Sand Tigers inside that they were going to feed.

We have some of the same animals in Long Beach at the Aquarium of the Pacific. But when we feed them, it's NEVER done with divers in the water. The sharks are fed off of a pole with a fish on the end. In Shanghai, they were a little more . . . relaxed . . . about this.

They bring the term "hand-feed" to a new level as they not only fed the Sand Tigers by hand (in their defense, they were wearing a chain-mail shark glove, but I don't think that would have offered much protection from a serious bite) but there were times when the feeding diver literally put his hand in the Sand Tiger's mouth to get him to take the fish. Not something I'd normally recommend or do myself. (And just to give you perspective, any time we go into Shark Lagoon at AOP, we always have a

safety diver - or two - with us who is armed with a long PVC pole to guide the sharks away from the divers who are working.)

But once the feed was done and the animals had calmed down a bit (which didn't take long), they gave us a short briefing, plopped us in a closed-off end of the exhibit to check weights and, when we indicated we were ready, slid open the gate to the exhibit and off we went.

I've always enjoyed diving with big animals like this, whether it's in the wild or even in the confines of an aquarium. And these animals (in addition to the Sand Tigers, there were some Blacktips, various Rays, some turtles, and assorted fish) certainly seemed very comfortable with humans, never even really giving us a second look or skittering away when we got close.

But what never fails to amaze me no matter what aquarium I've been diving in, is the reaction of the tourists/guests to people inside the exhibits. They go ga-ga. They're absolutely amazed that someone could be inside and would wave back to them. China was no exception. We posed for dozens of pictures (and there's no way with the masks and gear on that they could tell we were Westerners) during the thirty minutes we were under, picked up dozens of souvenir shark

teeth, and we simply had a blast.

The following day, we made it to the new downtown area (east side of the river by the Pearl Tower) and toured the Shanghai Ocean Aquarium, Asia's largest, which opened in 2002. But I came away a little underwhelmed.

There were an awful lot of fresh-water animals exhibited, which is OK, but generally not as interesting to me as their salt-water cousins. The aquarium's got Education people throughout to answer questions and while some apologized to us about their English, but it was certainly good enough for us to understand what was going on.

And they certainly should be commended for their "Save Our Sharks" exhibition, which is going on through Labor Day, and which details the plight of the over-fishing of sharks in Asian waters. Given the notorious reputation most Asian countries have for over-fishing, they're top be commended for tackling such a politically sensitive topic.

But the highlight of the place is their underwater viewing tunnel, the longest in the world at 120-meters and it was pretty nifty.

You start be descending a good thirty feet or so down an escalator that's surrounded by a clear plastic tube. So you really get the feeling of going "underwater" as you start viewing this part of the aquarium. Then you can step on to a very slow-moving belt (people-mover) that will gently take you through the entire tunnel and allow you to see everything. The belt is only half the width of the tunnel, so you can easily step off to stop and look at something, and then step back on (or just walk it

on your own by yourself).

Another nice feature is that the tunnel is completely acrylic and submerged, so the animal that's on your right can easily swim up and over your head and end up on your left. It really does give you a nice view of the undersides of some of the animals and while as divers may be used to seeing such things, the general public there that day with us was oooo-ing and aaaah-ing (in Chinese of course - but it sounds the same) with great abandon.

If you're in Shanghai, both aquariums are worth seeing. And for some pictures from each, check out the bottom of page 4. We may not have gotten the dive we expected but we had a good time and I can now say: "I dove China!!!"

ROBERT'S STILL REPAIRING

A lot f times people forget that, although we closed the brick-and-mortar retail store two-and-a-half years ago, we didn't stop doing repairs. We know how hard it can be to find a scuba repair person you trust and we've always gotten nothing but glowing comments

about the work performed for you by Robert Stark.

So that's why we moved out entire repair operation from 8612 Wilshire to Robert's garage in his home near LAX, a few blocks from Manchester/Lincoln. Instead of bringing your stuff to Beverly Hills, you simply bring to directly to Robert.

That actually has a few advantages since he's willing to be "open" at some odd hours during the morning or evening. All you do is give him a call and agree on a time for drop-off or pick-up. (Yes can also have stuff shipped to or from him as well and we'll simply add on whatever the UPS charges are.) On top of all of that, we've set up a direct number that rings right in Robert's home: 310/947-8523. There's also a direct e-mail: rsrepair@pacbell.net.

At Reef Seekers, our goal is still to take as good care of you as is possible. And while we might not offer the breadth of services we did previously, we still strive to meet your every need and expectation is the areas where we can help you. If its time for your gear to be serviced, get in touch with Robert and set up an appointment. You'll be glad you did.

DIVING VACATIONS

October 11-18 • Sea of Cortez

**February 7-13, 2010 • Florida
(Manatees & Caverns)**

May 21-29, 2010 • Bonaire

DIVING WITH THE MANATEES IN FEBRUARY

We're already well under way with preparations for our return to Florida in February, 2010, to dive with the Manatees in the Crystal River area, and to explore the caverns and sinkholes in north central Florida as well. The nice thing about this trip is that we can run it with relatively few people and we've already got enough to make a go of it so this is definitely on for 2010.

However, due to the nature of the beast, there's an upper limit for the number of people I like to take on this, so it's the type of trip that can fill rather quickly. The point being is that if you're interested, you should let me know.

The dates are set for Sunday, February 7 through Saturday, February 13. This means we do all of our diving Monday-Friday and avoid the weekend crowds. (It also means we're home in time for Valentine's Day.) We'll fly LAX-Orlando on Sunday, pick up SUV rental vehicles, and then we drive to Crystal River, about two hours away.

We'll spend three nights in Crystal River, diving Monday and Tuesday all day, both days from pontoon boats at various spots where we'll find Manatees, small caverns to explore, and an old catfish hole that I'll try to find (known as Catfish Corner - packed with catfish, but I've got to find it as we dove it years ago and it's no longer on any of the maps).

Wednesday is our transition/travel day and we'll hopefully get in a morning drift along the Rainbow Run, lunch up in Williston, and

UPCOMING BOAT DIVES

Sat	Aug. 8	<i>Cee Ray</i>	---- CANCELED ----	\$140/155
Sun	30	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	160/175
Sun	Sept. 13	<i>Great Escape</i>	Catalina (West End)	140/155
Sat	26	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (frontside)	165/180
Sun	Oct. 18	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Cat. backside	150/165
Sat	31	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	160/175
Sat	Nov. 14	<i>Sea Bass</i>	--- Oil Rigs (adv. dive) ---	145/160

Prices are listed as 14-day advanced purchase/regular. Food/air included all trips. All diving to be done on compressed air only - no nitrox. Fuel surcharge may apply.

then an afternoon dive at Blue Grotto, followed by a drive into High Springs (Alachua) where we'll encamp for three more nights.

Thursday we'll spend the whole day at Ginnie Springs, diving the main spring, some smaller springs, and drifting the river. Then on Friday, we'll head in to Branford & Mayo where we'll visit Orange Grove Sink and then stop for lunch at Nell's which has simply the best all-you-can-eat -buffet (and incredibly good fried chicken) that you'll ever enjoy. We'll finish up the afternoon with a dive at Troy Springs.

And some of this will be flexible depending on water conditions. There are areas like Itchituknee Springs, Manatee Springs, Devils' Den, and more than could be added to our plans. One of the fun things about this is that it's a fairly flexible schedule.

It's a fairly inexpensive trip, too. Land portion is \$1495. Airfare is now running around \$500 but there are also plenty of opportunities to fly into Orlando using miles and save yourself some money. I've already used miles to book myself on the 8:30AM American Airlines non-stop (gets in around 4:30PM) and would ask if you're flying a

different airline, you try to arrive about the same time I do. If you're going to pay for a ticket, you can book it or I can do it for you.

But no matter how it all comes together, this is a really fun trip that offers some very unique diving opportunities and some very wonderful and special animal encounters. Let me know if you're interested.

TWO MORE DIVE SHOPS CLOSE

Add Xtreme Scuba in Ventura and West Coast Divers Supply in Van Nuys to the list of stores that have closed their doors in the last few years. It underscores how tough it is to make a profit in this industry but also (hopefully) points out to you the crucial role you play in supporting the dive businesses that you want to see thrive. If you want your favorite shop (or boat) to stick around, make sure you patronize them when you can. We know it's tough out there for everyone and at Reef Seekers, we hope we've earned your trust so that you'll keep doing business with us and will keep diving with us. We'd hate to be forced to pack it all in.



SHARK WEEK ON THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Sunday marks the beginning of the annual "Shark Week" on the Discovery Channel. It's really the promotion that propelled them to fame and made them Must-See TV. Although the early incarnations had shark shows running almost around the clock, now they only run from

8-10PM. but they've got some interesting things scheduled.

The most intriguing one looks to be "Sharks After Dark" which will air Thursday at 9PM and will feature rare nighttime footage of sharks, captured using infrared cameras and high-tech stuff like that. Should be interesting.

Check your local listings for exact times and airdates or you can get the sked on their website at www.discovery.com or discovery.com/sharkweek.

VIZ IMPROVING, WATER'S WARMING

It's been a weird summer so far, where we'll have one week of great

viz and warm water, followed by another week of cooler water and lessened viz. But - if the last two weeks are any indication - it looks like the better conditions are here to stay (at least for a few months). And generally that means far into the fall, even as late as December.

There's certainly been talk of whether or not we're heading into even a mild El Nino condition. There are mixed thoughts but that might be some of the reason for the fluxuating conditions. But we've been getting reports of 50-70' viz at Catalina, and water temps just shy of 70° and that all sounds pretty nice.

So if you've been holding back because of water conditions, hold back no more!!! The water is fine and waiting for you to plunge in.

PICTURE PAGE - Shanghai, China

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2009)



Putting the "hand" in "hand-fed"



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Business end of a Sanfd Tiger



Posing for pix with the tourists



Entering the UW tunnel at the big Aqaurium



Serious case of overbite