

Skin Diver

[Sign Up!](#)
[Register](#)
[Buddies](#)
[Clubs](#)
[Quizzes](#)
[Contests](#)
[Links](#)
[Search](#)
[Help](#)

SHARKS

OF THE PACIFIC AND INDIAN OCEANS

Top Sharks Encounters by Various Authors



Sharks were once considered mindless eating machines and a real menace to people. Time has disproved these theories. Now people travel the world to dive with and photograph sharks. It is always an exhilarating and, usually, an enlightening experience. New things are being learned about sharks every day. And, we have realized it is not sharks that threaten humans

but we who threaten sharks' very existence. What follows are the top shark encounters of the Pacific and the Indian Oceans; ten articles on ten areas by nine authors. We asked for classic dives on classic sites. Read on to find out what these are off California, Mexico, Costa Rica, Tahiti, Fiji, the Solomons, Papua New Guinea, Palau, Australia and Thailand.

Southern California's Avalon Bank

'Jump in and swim to the cage,' the divemaster told me. The cage was 15 feet beneath the surface in about 2,000 feet of water, 25 yards away; the chumline (stream of mashed fish pieces) was wafting between the cage and the stern of the boat; and Blue Sharks were following the chumline, looking for its source, which was hanging off the stern.

I had willingly come out to this site off Southern California's Santa Catalina Island to dive with sharks but, faced with the prospect of actually doing it, my resolve weakened. Why on earth had I thought this was a good idea? It was too late to admit I was a devout coward, I was geared up and standing on the dive platform. I jumped in and swam the fastest 25 yards of my life, scuba gear or no scuba gear. When I reached the cage I got inside and closed the door. My heart was in my throat; I was hyperventilating.

Once in the cage I gradually relaxed as I took in the scene. There were only two Blues and they were cruising gracefully and peacefully by, then around and under the boat. Their large black eyes made them look perpetually surprised. I found no

menace in their glances, only curiosity. If a large chunk of chum came their way, they'd eat it-but they didn't go out of their way to do so and they didn't seem all that hungry.



Two other divers joined me in the cage-then the sharks disappeared. My buddies got out, emboldened by the absence of sharks. I hesitated, then I, too, left the shelter. It was fun and it was exhilarating. I felt as if I was taunting death out there in the blue without Blues.

Then, suddenly, one Blue and then another appeared. I immediately retreated to the cage. My buddies stayed out, however, and were soon enjoying close encounters and getting, I'm sure, great photos. They didn't get eaten, attacked or maimed. Soon I was out there with them, enjoying the most exciting dive of my life. The sharks would come right up to us but would leave if we fended them off with our cameras. They were unhurried and unaggressive.

I made three jumps that day and felt like a veteran shark diver when I surfaced from the last one. Wow! Who ever thought that jumping into shark infested waters could be fun?!-**Bonnie J. Cardone.**

The Isla Revillagigedos' San Benedicto Island

For encounters with big pelagics, the four lone volcanic Islas Revillagigedos, 224 miles south of the Baja Peninsula, are among the world's most renowned destinations. In addition to the giant Manta Rays off San Benedicto and Socorro, there are inquisitive Bottlenose Dolphins, large Yellowfin Tuna and sharks such as Silky, Dusky and Silvertip and, of course, schooling Hammerheads.

The chance of seeing huge schools of Scalloped Hammerheads (*Sphyrna lewini*), numbering 150 plus, is more than a mere flight of fancy in the Revillagigedos. The submerged volcanic ridge of Cabo Pearce off Socorro, the small, rock island of Roca Partida (midway between Clarion and San Benedicto), as well as the north side of San Benedicto's Roca Fortuna, have remained highly consistent producers. During a trip on the Solmar V in the latter part of 1998, weather conditions forced us to seek shelter around San Benedicto's south side at a site called the Anchorage, adjacent to a huge, solidified lava flow. In addition to serving as the vessel's nighttime mooring site, it is often a good place for Mantas, but schooling Hammerheads had never been seen there.

While we were exploring a spot roughly 500 feet away from the normal dive site, at a depth of 80 feet, Hammerheads began to appear from the open side of the drop-off. At first there were only a few, then the mother lode-a gigantic, pulsating black cloud of large sharks with T-shaped heads. Wow! Turning to Scott, the chief divemaster, I pulled my regulator momentarily away to mouth 'Not a good place for Hammerheads-did you bother to tell them?' Grinning from ear to ear, he shrugged his shoulders to tell me, 'What can I say?'

The sharks remained, patrolling the edge of the drop through two more dives-confirming that the Anchorage was turning out to be the new hot ticket for sharks in the Revillagigedos-**Walt Stearns.**

Costa Rica's Alcyon Seamount

Bob Cranston and I tumbled over the ledge at the Alcyon Seamount, struggling to control the 250 pound Imax camera system as the strong current carried us downstream. It was like hanging on to an angry sow in a pig wrestling contest. Bob's mask was half filled with water and I had just received a fresh tattoo on my rear end from a spiny sea urchin. Anyone watching would have found the scene hilarious.



Kicking like crazy, we used all of our strength to drive the bulky camera down to a sandy patch behind a ledge at 98 feet, where we found protection from the current. There, I hoped to find a calm spot where I could control the camera and hold it still enough to take a shot. Suddenly, Hammerheads were everywhere. An enormous school of sharks seemed to engulf the seamount. As I raised the camera to shoot, Hammerheads passed in squadrons, some so close I could reach out and touch them. I turned the camera on and watched as 200 Hammerheads filled my viewfinder. I imagined what this spectacular scene would look like when the finished film was projected on an Imax screen 80 feet high and 110 feet wide. Island of the Sharks will certainly live up to its title! -**Howard Hall**.

Tahiti's Shark Cave

Our Zodiac inflatable slowed to an idle and, when our French dive instructor gave the signal, we rolled effortlessly backward off the rubbery gunwale. The water was deliciously warm and crystal clear.

I was astounded by the underwater visibility! It was easily 200 feet-an awesome sight for a first dive. This was the legendary Tahiti of which I had always dreamed.

We made a casual falling leaf descent, floating with the incoming current. With such visibility, I could not help comparing the experience to my skydiving adventure. It was freefall in slow motion.

At first, I did not see them, but as my eyes adjusted to the increasingly dim lighting conditions, I began to see a number of sharks swimming along with us. They were on both sides, ahead of us, below us, in back of us and above us. We were actually immersed in a school of Gray Reef Sharks. We could see (and count) more than 200 sharks spread across Tiputa Pass, Rangiroa's best shark diving location.

It took all the control I could muster to refrain from shooting the entire roll of film during the descent. Each shark was an exquisite form that begged for a photo session. I kept telling myself, not yet, not yet. Our photo shoot was still below and ahead of us.

At 110 feet we reached our destination, a small coral cave embedded in the slope on the north side of Tiputa Pass. The three of us slipped inside the small cave and knelt on the sandy floor. From the cave entrance, the view was awesome.

Gray Reef Sharks began gathering in great numbers, swimming faster and packing close together. It was as if someone had rung a silent dinner bell. Our presence in the cave was the sharks' signal that lunch was about to be served.

Our dive guide opened the food bucket and the dance began. Sharks began snapping up the bits of fish chunks, out maneuvering each other and occasionally colliding. For two minutes, it was a magnificent ballet as the sharks executed acrobatic twists and turns, rolls and loops. Then it was over. The food was gone and the sharks were once again swimming serenely, almost ignoring our presence. We left the protection of our small cave and continued to drift with the incoming tide,

while dozens of sharks coasted along with us. During the drift and safety stop, I couldn't help noticing how well man and sharks co-exist when each knows what the other wants-**Geri Murphy**.

Fiji's Supermarket



Fiji's western waters offer one of the most exciting shark dives-Supermarket-ever. The adventure begins as anywhere from 15 to 50 divers form a large circle on the ocean floor. This popular shallow water dive is orchestrated by Api Bati, a strong Fijian whose rapport with these sleek critters has a calming influence over divers. One minute the waters are quiet and serene, then magically the scene changes. Sharks seem to come from everywhere! In darts a Whitetip to grab a bite of the bait.

Before he exits, an even larger Bronze Whaler circles in from the other direction. Suddenly the water is alive with sharks! Although the sharks are only interested in the meal that Api offers, the excitement is high as these sharks circle within a few feet of the divers.

Most of the sharks look alike to divers, but not to Api. He has worked with this group so many times he knows each shark's feeding habits. Some he strokes as they come in, others he grabs and gives a Fijian hug. He keeps them organized, making sure the shark feeding remains calm and lasts for more than 15 to 20 minutes.

Since the sharks come so close, you can get some great photos in addition to a thrill. Non-photographers will find the best viewing is in the front row, where you can get a close look as the sharks come in to take a bite of the bait. Photographers interested in getting shark portraits will find a better position on the outer edge of the divers. The sharks will circle the group before coming in for the food and will pass within three to four feet of the divers. Our best shots were taken by panning the shark with a 20mm lens. This panning action with flash keeps the shark sharp but blurs the background.

Access to Supermarket is from Aqua Trek on Mana Island and several other local dive operations. Be sure to plan a visit to the Supermarket on your next trip to Fiji, this is one dive not to be missed-**Jack and Sue Drafahl**.

Descending into the swirling water of Passage Rock, I knew this was going to be a great 'big fish' dive. In the Florida Islands, a small group in the remote Solomon Islands, the site is exposed to some ferocious currents, which in turn attract a great number of fish. In order to avoid being swept out into the blue, I rapidly kicked down to 50 feet, inching my way into the current. It was so strong I could feel it tugging on my regulator. I kept my face forward and into the current, realizing that if I turned sideways my mask would be ripped from my face. As I continued down the wall, I finally reached the point of the reef, where the current was flowing over my head and down the sides of the rock structures. Settling behind a large coral formation, I first noticed two Gray Reef Sharks, followed by several Rainbow Runners. Obviously agitated, the sharks were shimmying and shaking in the attempt to get the Rainbow Runners off their backs.



As I continued to observe, I began to see more and more Gray Reef Sharks, perhaps as many as ten, along with a couple of White-tipped Reef Sharks, moving in to check me out. A little higher in the water column, several Black Trevallies, gigantic Dogtooth Tunas and Wahoos swam without effort into the ripping waterflow. My position below the current made for an excellent observation point and is perhaps one of the Solomons' best kept secrets.

Although the archipelago is not known for huge numbers of sharks, there are plenty of sites where reef sharks can be encountered. However, it often requires an upcurrent swim, which prevents divers' bubbles from flowing toward the sharks and causing them to retreat into deeper waters-**Casey Mahaney**.

[Next Page](#)

