

Diving El Bajo in the Sea of Cortez



Well it was my 40th last Saturday so I decided my B-day present to myself would be a dive at a place called "El Bajo" hopefully to see some hammerhead sharks which the place is world famous for. This is one of the only places in the world that the Hammerheads school into large groups. What follows is description of a 2 tank dive in the sea 2 days ago.



We left the dock at Club Cortez at about 8:45 and headed for El Bajo with a slight norther blowing. Not a great sign so early in the morning as El Bajo is located 6 miles north east of isla Partida. It is a sea mount in the open sea and is about 70 feet down to the top of it. It really is made of two mounts and the sea floor off the mounts goes to 130 feet and deeper. We weren't the first boat there but we were the first in the water. Several companies had showed up as this is the

latter part of the season where the weather is good, water is warm and clear and the sharks are there.

As we descended the visibility appeared to be not excellent but good at about 70 feet. After grouping up at the anchor we headed off the mount north in to the deeper blue. This is where the sharks are normally found. We weren't off the mount a 100 feet and I saw the first tail ahead and below. We swam hard to catch up swimming against the current. I was hoping I would get a better look as you don't always find a school but just a few at a time such as I had always been in the pas for me.

However, I soon realized this was to be a special day! As we got closer to the first, more appeared from below, out the the haze of plankton. At any onetime I could see 30 or more ranging from 4-18 feet long. Then as leveled off at 130' it was obvious there were closer to a 100 swimming below and around us. At one point while I looked over to my instructor buddy he was signaling me to look at large batch near him I turned around what seemed to be the largest I had seen cruised past me about 20 feet away. He was around 18', I guess, and turned broadside to me as he looked me right in the eye.



These are amazing animals. They are some of the most pre-historic looking of all the sharks of which most have not physically evolved for a long, long time. The big one definitely got my attention (translates

to: I really sucked some air!) and it was soon time to begin out ascent as at that depth you have to be sure to save air for a safety stop on the way back. Once back on board everybody was really excited and felt very blessed to have had that experience.

We then headed for Isle Lotes where we had planned to dive with the sea lions. A very regular stop for many dive companies and the wind had almost died completely. On the way over we encountered a pod of 30-50 pilot whales some got a chance to jump in and swim with them. We were in deep water and the pod would dive when they saw us so they were very brief encounters. You jump back in the boat get ahead of them and wait for them to swim to you. It kind of felt like jumping in front of a stampede but they had plenty of room and would swim down or around us. Definitely a bonus for the day!

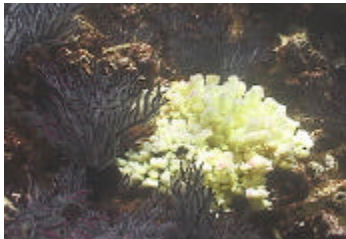
After our lunch stop and rest we began our next dive at the sea lion colony. The water was clear and very warm even at 70 feet. After swimming around the point and back through the arch it was time to go find some pups to play with. The sea lions are very much like dogs and the little ones love to play. There were a lot of people there by this time and it was getting crowded with not many sea lions around. I swam on down the island to find a little cove where I found 6 pups playing with each other under the direction of one very lazy Mom.

We had a great time for 15 minutes or so. Just me and the pups, doing somersaults. They love it if you twist around and somersault a lot. They get excited and copy everything you do. They are at the time of year they are teething a bit so I needed to keep an eye on my hands and they were always nibbling on my fins. Eventually Mom came over to check me out and I figured it was time to back off and give her, her space. The other clients showed after a bit and I showed them how to play with him. One 13 year old girl just had the time of her life.

Well, after all that we packed it up and headed for home. On the way back Ricardo my instructor asked me if I as in a hurry to get back? I said "no way" because I knew hat he was thinking. While the water is this warm there is a very good chance that the whale sharks would be feeding just outside the bay along the "El Mogote" (sand spit). He had seen them the day before so the chances were good we could find them.

We arrived along the beach in about 15' water and began a crisscross search with another of the dive boats from Cortez Club. Within 15 minutes or so e sighted the first one. Yee haw into the water I went to swim with the largest fish in the world! They are not really sharks and while they grow up to 45 feet they eat plankton only. They are awesome!

I had never had the chance to swim with them for so long. I tagged a ride on one for a few minutes till he took me deep and I had to return to the surface for air. the biggest was probably 30-35' and the smallest was a cute little 15-18 footer. I swam alongside her and looked her right in the eye. They are very docile but can move right along when they want tot. The visibility was only 30', from all the plankton, so you cant really see them from one end to the other.



I could go on with more details and what not but this is an email not a novel. So for you diver types the best time of year for the sharks and whale sharks is mid August to end of October. It was definitely one of my best b-day presents ever and a day I will not soon forget. Quoting one of the other clients, who has dove the world over for several years,

"That was the best day of diving in my life"...Kind of hard to top that.

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