



Isla Holbox

Swim with the largest
aggregation of
whale sharks
in the world!

Holbox

Isla Holbox, located on the northeastern tip of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, hosts the largest seasonal aggregation of whale sharks in the world. Visibility may be less than in other areas due to the rich broth of plankton, but that is what brings these ocean giants to Holbox.

Whale Shark Research

SRI began collecting photo IDs of whale sharks at Holbox in 1999, and has been observing their behavior & photographing the sharks ever since. We've identified up to 60 different sharks in a single week! Because the sharks are feeding, no scuba will be used; it is snorkeling only.



During 2009, we will once again be collaborating with Ecocean which has developed pattern-recognition software that enables photographic identification of individual whale sharks.

Objectives

This project is field oriented and will seek to:

- Record sea surface temperatures where whale sharks are feeding
- Gather photographs of individual whale sharks for the Ecocean database
- Gather data showing the economic benefits of whale shark tourism to the local economy

Cost: \$1,500

Cost includes transfers to and from Cancun airport to Chiquila, double occupancy hotel room, boat and crew. It does not include airfare, ferry to Isla Holbox, meals, gear rental or gratuities).

June 23 to June 27, 2009

9 spaces available

Call now to reserve your space

Telephone: 609.921.3522

Email: expeditions@sharks.org

The Whale Shark

The whale shark is the largest fish in the sea, reaching a length of 40 feet and more. These “gentle giants” feed on plankton, and are considered harmless to man.

Their gentle disposition makes them highly vulnerable to over-fishing and slow to recover from over-exploitation. Because of this, conservationists are concerned about the vulnerability of the whale shark and the threat of extinction. A five-year aerial survey conducted by SRI along the coast of South Africa documented a drastic decline in whale sharks. The shark is also considered a ‘species of concern on the Red List of the IUCN (World Conservation Union). In 2002, India and the Philippines successfully proposed the whale shark for inclusion on Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). This research is designed to obtain data necessary for CITES Appendix I protection for whale sharks.

Quantifying the value of whale shark tourism to the economy of Mexico serves to ensure their continued protection and encourages other countries to legislate similar protection for the sharks as living natural resources.

Itinerary

A shuttle van will transport us from the Cancun airport to the village of Chiquila where we will board a ferry to the Island of Holbox, 8 miles across the Yalahao channel. Once on the island we take a golf cart taxi to our hotel. In the morning we will be issued wrist bands which everyone entering the Whale Shark Reserve must wear.

The crew will explain the code of conduct for viewing the whale sharks. We board our panga at the village pier. The panga will take a maximum of ten snorkelers. Only two snorkelers plus the guide are allowed in the water at one time. We will rotate into the water throughout the morning swimming with the whale sharks as they feed in the rich currents of the reserve. We might be treated to the sight of giant manta rays launching themselves into the air and plopping down with a thunderous crash and foaming whitewater. Several years we’ve also witnessed the migration of thousands of golden stingrays!

The pangas return to the dock in the early afternoon. That leaves us time for lunch at one of the island restaurants. After lunch take a siesta or perhaps an open air massage on the hotel's beachfront. Afternoons are hot and most people opt for nap time or just sitting in the water relaxing.

After sunset and during the cooler evenings is when most people come out to stroll along the beach or visit the many shops in the village of Holbox. There are a number of small restaurants serving anything from pizza to fresh seafood. We'll have three days on the water with the whale sharks and mantas. There are plenty of optional tours available before or after a visit to Holbox. You can spend some time in Cancun at one of the posh resort hotels, head south to Cozumel for some scuba diving, try cenote diving, or visit the Mayan ruins of Tulum or Chitzen Itza.

