

SPORTS

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Lemons & Tigers & Bulls, Oh My!

Shark Diving at Tiger Beach

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Member since 2014

A year ago my husband **Don** asked me if I'd like to go shark diving. "Nope" was my quick and certain answer. Sharks are beautiful and we often see one or two on our normal scuba outings, but to go into a swarm of sharks on purpose? Nope. As usual, my initial caution could not hold back the inescapable tide of Don's enthusiasm. And when our Ocean Reef diving buddies **J** and **Delia Guarch** wanted to go with us, it was just a matter of getting our shark experts scheduled and then crossing the Gulf Stream to famous Tiger Beach in the northwest Bahamas.

We were very lucky to find Connor Cassidy and Jamin Martinelli, both highly recommended and highly experienced shark guides, to come on board with us. We loaded 12 scuba tanks and all the associated equipment for 6 divers onto our Fleming 78 motor yacht "Blue Pearl," which is outfitted especially for diving, and the profusion of paraphernalia needed for underwater photography.

Popular culture hammers us with the message that sharks will eat you. No wonder the first time jumping off the boat into a school of sharks took enormous will. And after that it was easy.

For safety, we wore black head-to-toe so we would look unlike anything normally on a shark's menu; we moved



Sharks swirl around as J Guarch swims just below Blue Pearl. Photo by Denise Bermant.

slowly and calmly, and were over-weighted in order to kneel quietly on the bottom without fidgeting. This is not an adventure for inexperienced divers – you must stay alert and maintain composure as sharks swim up to face you! Guidance regarding shark behavior from Connor and Jamin was invaluable.

We dove with the sharks twice a day for three days, staying underwater on the sunlit shallow sand for up to an hour and half each time.

At one time there were more than two dozen Lemon and Reef sharks, and 7 Tiger Sharks all swimming an intricate ballet around us, with two Bull Sharks loitering on the edges of visibility. Never having seen Tiger Sharks up close before, we were spellbound by their huge black eyes, the languid grace of their enormous bodies, skin gorgeously patterned in irregular bars and spots. I had not realized that Tiger Sharks are the second largest Requiem Shark; they can reach up to 18 feet long! Meanwhile the cat-eyed Lemon and Reef sharks swirled around us, often approaching the camera with a toothy grin but twisting away as soon as you make eye contact.

Not to make light of their



Delia Guarch in cloud of Lemon sharks and Reef sharks. Photo by Don Bermant.



Tiger Shark coming in for a visit. Photo by Don Bermant.

power, because the potential for harm always exists, but in reality they were not much interested in us except as a novel oddity sitting on the sand of their neighborhood.

To spend hours as an intimate observer of these awe-inspiring but often maligned creatures was a magical experience that we will never forget.