

Text and Photography by Al Hornsby

When you think of shark diving, there are a number of renowned destinations that come to mind - the Bahamas, Tahiti, Australia - but not, definitely not, Grand Cayman. Until now, that is. Grand Cayman is jumping into the shark diving market head first with its own shark dive at Shark Alley, a reef bursting with life just outside the South Channel off the island's East End. Established by the Ocean Frontiers dive operation, the Shark Awareness Project, licensed by the Cayman Islands' Marine Conservation Board, is a jaw-dropping diving and educational experience, all in 50 feet of Cayman-clear water.

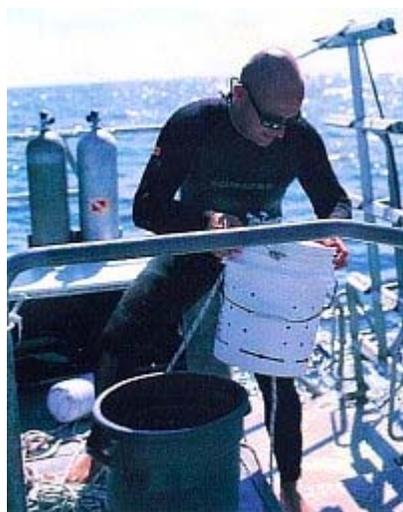
A resident band of about 20 Caribbean Reef Sharks attend the feeds, conducted each Thursday and Saturday by Ocean Frontiers' staff. The dive procedure has been designed specifically to minimize the direct association between divers and food.

When the boat arrives at the site, a crate of squid is lowered to the bottom before divers get in the water. Once the feed starts, divers descend to observe from



close proximity. The crystal water and colorful reef, along with the Yellowtail Snappers and Horse-eye Jacks that gather around the bait, make this an U/W photographer's dream dive. And the sharks show little shyness at being photographed from close range.

But it's not all just an adrenaline rush. With Ocean Frontiers' shark encounter, divers will have the thrill of learning something useful, as well.



"Our goal with the program is to offer exciting dives and education to divers, as well as add to the science concerning sharks and shark behavior," according to Mark Kay, who runs the shark project. "We are also licensed to conduct tagging, and we cooperate with the University of New Brunswick, **Nova University** and the **Guy Harvey Shark Research Program**, among others."

The Thursday dive is preceded by an educational session, briefing participants on what to expect in the water and giving interesting insights into shark behavior and physiology. The Saturday session involves a half-day educational program followed by a shark dive research task. Guests assist the crew, and earn a PADI specialty, too.

For more information, contact Ocean Frontiers, (345) 947-7500, or the US. reservations office at (800) 544-6576, www.oceanfrontiers.com.

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