

Isla Mujeres readies for Whale Shark Festival



A whale shark.

By: Laura Del Rosso June 02, 2010

Isla Mujeres, the Caribbean island off the coast of Cancun, will celebrate the whale shark, the world's largest species of fish, at the Third Annual Whale Shark Festival, an event that showcases the island's achievements, traditions and the environment July 16 to 18.

The festival is organized by Ceviche Tours, a local firm, and the Isla Mujeres Department of Tourism.

Thousands of visitors typically take part in the Whale Shark Festival, which offers guests an opportunity to participate in

ecotourism adventures such as swimming with the fish, which pose no danger to humans.

Some 1,400 whale sharks make their way through the waters of Isla Mujeres every summer. The festival is held during a period in which hundreds of the sharks typically come together in a "Whale Shark Bloom," in which they swim as a group near the coast.

The festival also features traditional dances performed by local troupes and opportunities to explore Mayan ruins. Scientists from around the world will present seminars on marine biology, sustainable ecotourism and Mayan architecture.

A portion of the festival proceeds will be donated to several not-for-profit environmental organizations.

Whale shark season runs from May through September, during which time the sharks swim the Caribbean waters around Isla Mujeres and along the coast of Cancun, feeding on plankton.

During the 2010 season, the Natural Commission of Protected Natural Areas will install satellite transmitters on 15 different whale sharks to research behavioral patterns as part of the Domino Research Project.

Ceviche Tours, the event co-organizer, provides sustainable ecotourism and travel services to the Yucatan and Isla Mujeres. The company was founded by John and Adriana Vater of Spa Adriana in Huntington Village, N.Y., and Isla Mujeres native Luis "Cuco" Refugio and his family.

Ceviche Tours works with the indigenous islanders of Isla Mujeres to help preserve their culture and maintain the integrity and beauty of the surrounding marine environment.

Participants on Ceviche's whale shark tours can be part of identification and tracking efforts. For more information see www.cevichetours.com. For a complete listing of 2010 Whale Shark Festival activities and for more information, visit www.whalesharkfest.com.