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**Dates Announced for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Whale Shark Festival in Isla Mujeres, Mexico**

**Swimming with Whale Sharks, Traditional Dancing and More  
to Preserve a Fragile Marine Ecosystem**

**ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO – December 13, 2010** – Celebrating the beauty and culture of Isla Mujeres, Mexico, and championing the need to preserve a fragile marine ecosystem, ecotourism travel agency Ceviche Tours and the Isla Mujeres Department of Tourism announce the Fourth Annual Whale Shark Festival, a community extravaganza that showcases the achievements, the traditions and the environmental splendor of Isla Mujeres.

The Festival will be held July 15-17, 2011 in Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

Last year thousands flocked to the family-friendly Whale Shark Festival, which offers guests an opportunity to participate in ecotourism adventures such as swimming with whale sharks, the largest fish in the ocean and an endangered species; traditional dancing performed by local troupes; exploring ancient Mayan ruins and much more.

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

**Sustainable Ecotourism**

The Whale Shark Festival is an effort to raise awareness for the need to preserve the area's marine ecosystem. Isla Mujeres is part of the second largest barrier reef on the planet, and serves as the nursery of the Caribbean and the migratory path of whale sharks, sea turtles, water fowl and game fishes.

“Sustainable eco-tourism engages guests in the effort to preserve the culture of Isla Mujeres, their way of life and the marine environment,” said John Vater, who co-founded Ceviche Tours with his wife, Adriana, and longtime friend and Isla Mujeres native Luis “Cuco” Refugio and his family.

**Swim with 200+ Whale Sharks**

Kicking off the Festival will be the whale shark bloom, when hundreds of these gentle giants will come together to swim in a group near the coast of Isla Mujeres. As many as 1,400 whale sharks may make their way through the waters north of Isla Mujeres every summer, according to Dr. Robert Hueter,

Director of the Center for Shark Research, Mote Marine Laboratory and scheduled speaker at the 2011 Whale Shark Festival.

### **Exciting Activities for the Whole Family**

Guests of the Festival can participate in a wide array of activities:

Swimming with Whale Sharks -- Guests can swim with whale sharks and join an effort by Project Domino, a conservation program implemented by the Mexican government, to protect and preserve these graceful creatures. Guests can add their underwater photos of the whale sharks to Project Domino's visual database of the unique markings, or spots, that can identify individual whale sharks and track them. Images from the Project Domino regional database are shared with a global database from nonprofit Ecocean.

“International events, and especially those such as the Whale Shark Festival which have a strong local element as well, are absolutely essential to increase the conservation culture through environmental education,” noted Rafael de la Parra, Lead Marine Biologist for Project Domino, a Festival sponsor.

Fun for Families -- The Festival will feature activities for kids to learn about helping the environment. “Educating children about the importance of recycling, showing them how they can get involved to protect the marine environment and its biodiversity -- with beach cleanups, and just the choices they make every day – is vital to our future,” said Catalina Galindo de Prince, Executive Director of the nonprofit Amigos de Isla Contoy, A.C., also a Festival sponsor.

### **Academic Seminars and Film Showcase**

Scientists from around the world will attend to present a series of Academic Seminars on marine biology, sustainable ecotourism and Mayan architecture.

### **Booking Travel**

Travel arrangements and bookings for whale shark tours can be made through the Ceviche Tours Website ([www.cevichetours.com](http://www.cevichetours.com)).

### **For More Information**

For a complete listing of 2011 Whale Shark Festival activities and for more information, visit <http://www.whalesharkfest.com/> [www.whalesharkfest.com](http://www.whalesharkfest.com) or [www.cevichetours.com](http://www.cevichetours.com).

### **About Ceviche Tours**

Ceviche Tours provides sustainable ecotourism and travel services to the Yucatan and Isla Mujeres, Mexico. Founded by John and Adriana Vater of Spa Adriana in Huntington Village, NY, with longtime friend 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. Through education and photo identification efforts, Ceviche Tours joins the worldwide effort to protect and preserve whale sharks. As participants on our whale shark tours, guests are invited to be part of those identification and tracking efforts. For more information, please contact [www.cevichetours.com](http://www.cevichetours.com).

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