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Press Contact

Hillary Call for Ceviche Tours
(917) 414-9262
hillary.call@mac.com
www.cevichetours.com

**Speakers Announced for the 4th Annual Whale Shark Festival[®]
in Isla Mujeres, Mexico**

**Project Domino, Mote Marine Laboratory's Center for Shark Research
to Present New Findings on Whale Sharks at Academic Showcase**

Biologists, Archaeologists to Speak About Mayan Culture, Environment, Sustainability

ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO – June 4, 2011 – Championing the need to preserve a fragile marine ecosystem, ecotourism travel agency [Ceviche Tours](#) and the [Isla Mujeres Department of Tourism](#) announce speakers for the Fourth Annual Whale Shark Festival[®], a community extravaganza that showcases the achievements, the traditions and the environmental splendor of Isla Mujeres, Mexico.

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

The speakers will present during an Academic Showcase – free to the public – during which leading marine biologists and Mayan researchers will discuss their latest research findings. The Academic Showcase will take place July 16 starting at 5:00pm on the municipality plaza.

Scientists from Project Domino, a conservation program implemented by the Mexican government will present their groundbreaking research on the *afuera*, or whale shark swarm, seen in the Isla Mujeres waters every summer. Mayan archaeologists, environmentalists, local experts and others will also discuss their expertise at the Academic Showcase.

Research on the Unprecedented Aggregation of Whale Sharks

Biol. Rafael de la Parra, Lead Marine Biologist for Project Domino will be presenting his research paper, "[An Unprecedented Aggregation of Whale Sharks, *Rhincodon typus*, in Mexican Coastal Waters of the Caribbean Sea.](#)" It investigates the unprecedented 2009 gathering of whale sharks off the coast of Isla Mujeres, a yearly aggregation that has experienced a significant rise in numbers of whale sharks. That year the whale shark bloom or "afuera" comprised the largest aggregation of whale sharks ever reported, with up to 420 whale sharks observed in a single aerial survey.

The paper was co-authored by [Mote Marine Laboratory](#), [Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute](#), [Smithsonian Institution](#), and the Georgia Aquarium Research Center at [Georgia Aquarium](#).

Confirmed Academic Seminar Presenters

Presenters to-date include:

- Rafael de la Parra, Marine Biologist, Project Domino -- “An Unprecedented Aggregation of Whale Sharks, *Rhincodon typus*, in Mexican Coastal Waters of the Caribbean Sea.”
- Dr. Robert Hueter, Director of the Center for Shark Research, Mote Marine Laboratory.
- Beatriz Galvan, Biologist, Researcher for Project Domino -- Updates from the Mexico-Belize-Honduras regional research group on whale sharks, with comparison to activity in Mozambique.
- Steve Fox, Owner, [Deep Blue Resort](#) and the first Ecocean collaborator outside of Australia – “Utila Whale Shark Research” (presentation to be given, Mr. Fox will not be attending).
- Alfonso Morales, Mayan Archaeologist – Discussing the Mayan culture.
- Jorge Mostalac, Certified Guide, Isla Mujeres – A closer look at the wonders of Isla Mujeres
- Gener Coral, Certified Guide, Isla Mujeres – “Whale Shark Tourism from the Guide’s Perspective.”

“Research and education together serve as the backbone for preservation. We are proud such distinguished speakers will present at the Academic Seminars as part of the Whale Shark Festival,” 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.

4th Annual Whale Shark Festival

Thousands flock to the family-friendly Whale Shark Festival annually, where guests can 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. The Festival is an effort to raise awareness for the need to preserve the area’s marine ecosystem. A portion of the Festival proceeds will be donated to environmental not-for-profit organizations.

Swim with 200+ Whale Sharks

Kicking off the Festival will be the whale shark *afuera*, 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 Festival speaker.

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.](#), a Festival sponsor.

Booking Travel

Travel arrangements and bookings for whale shark tours can be made through the Ceviche Tours Website (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 or www.cevichetours.com.

About the Whale Shark Festival®

The Whale Shark Festival[©] is a community extravaganza that showcases the achievements, the traditions and the environmental splendor of Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo, Mexico. It is an effort to raise awareness for the need to preserve the area's marine ecosystem. Guests can 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 more. For more information visit www.whalesharkfest.com.

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