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## **ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM EXPAND DATES FOR 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WHALE SHARK FESTIVAL**

**-Festival Scheduled for the Entire Week: July 20-27, 2014 -**

**ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO – JULY 2, 2014** – Celebrating the beauty and culture of Isla Mujeres, Mexico, the Department of Tourism for Isla Mujeres, Mexico, along with Ceviche Tours, an eco-tourism company; Amigos de Isla Contoy, which promotes the conservation of Isla Contoy and several environmental leaders have partnered to announce that it will expand the dates of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Whale Shark Festival which will now begin on July 20, 2014 and continue the entire week until July 27. As in past years, the Festival will be held in Isla Mujeres, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

Originally scheduled to take place over a three-day period, the festival now scheduled to take place over the course of seven days is a cultural extravaganza which showcases the achievements, traditions and environmental splendor of Isla Mujeres while championing the need to preserve a fragile marine ecosystem. In past years, the Festival has had a significant positive impact on the island's tourism increasing with increase in hotel occupancy and a surge in tourism-related businesses. This year, the Department of Tourism expects more than 5,000 guests to descend on Isla Mujeres during the festival which will host more cultural events, performances and Island color.

"The Festival has turned in to a global event and we felt we needed to extend the Festival so our guests can fully enjoy and experience the splendor of Isla Mujeres," said Sr. Gustavo Rodriguez Orozco, director of tourism for Isla Mujeres. "Isla Mujeres boasts a wealth of resources and ecotourism activities for guests to enjoy. With our Annual Whale Shark Festival, we have truly become *the* destination for ecotourism adventures."

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Whale Shark Festival kicks-off on Sunday, July 20 with a dazzling parade. Following the parade, The Whale Shark Festival will include several fun activities for children geared toward getting the kids excited about environmentalism. The Festival will showcase contests throughout the island in sand sculpting, best marine costume, whale shark drawing,

and whale shark piñatas. Exhibitions showcasing the beauty of the island will feature whale shark murals, photography, gastronomy and local handcrafted works of art. The Festival will host volleyball and basketball games as well as several workshops where guest will learn to craft using reusable materials.

The Festival continues with a dancing show showcasing time-honored dances present by the academies of the island, a golf cart parade and a beauty contest for young girls called "Miss Caribe Quintana Roo, 2014." Guests can visit nearby attractions such as the Whale Shark Exhibition and view a display of the winning marine figures made by local high school students.

Whale Shark season on Isla Mujeres runs from May 15<sup>th</sup> till September 15<sup>th</sup>, visitors can have an ecotourism adventure of a lifetime and swim with the whale sharks, the largest fish in the ocean and endangered species. Don't worry: these magnificent whale sharks are filter feeders, like whales they feed on plankton, algae and krill. And, all swimmers will swim with fully licensed, expert diver/guides. Besides swimming with the whale sharks, guests can participate in some of the other water activities that have made Isla Mujeres a favorite vacation spot: sport fishing, diving, and snorkeling tours of the pristine reefs.

#### Sustainable Eco-Tourism

In addition to celebrating the beauty of Isla Mujeres, the Whale Shark Festival is a concerted effort to raise awareness of the need to preserve the area's marine ecosystem. It 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, Manta Ray's and Dolphin as well as sea turtles, water fowl and game fishes.

"Sustainable eco-tourism engages guests in the effort to preserve the indigenous 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 Louis Refugio "Cuco" Aguirre, his son Jesus and their family. "The continued success of the Whale Shark Festival is indicative on how ecotourism can truly impact a community. International events like these are absolutely essential in raising awareness about the need for conservation efforts, and increasing participation by tourists and locals alike."

For a complete listing of 2014 Whale Shark Festival activities and for more information, visit <http://www.whalesharkfest.com> or [www.cevichetours.com](http://www.cevichetours.com). Information about Isla Mujeres can be found at [www.islamujeres.gob.mx](http://www.islamujeres.gob.mx).

#### About Blue Realm A.C.

Blue Realm A.C. is a Marine research and preservation NGO whose mission is to ensure a healthy, sustainable area of marine biodiversity in Northern Quintana Roo, which provides superlative natural phenomena for years to come. For more information about Blue Realm A.C. and to further read about the several projects that they are working on in order to create a UNESCO world

heritage site for the Northern Quintana Roo Marine Ecosystem so that we can protect, enjoy and study its inhabitants for many generations to come visit [www.blurealmproject.org](http://www.blurealmproject.org)

#### About Amigos de Isla Contoy

Amigos de Isla Contoy was founded on October of 1994 to promote the conservation of Isla Contoy, nature areas and regional projects of the Yucatan peninsula through the sustainable development of local communities in collaboration with the National Commission of Nature Protected Areas. Amigos de Isla Contoy develops environmental education programs for the entire community. With a special focus on educating children, Amigos de Isla Contoy has also initiated a successful Conservation of Coral Reefs program for all students, beach cleanups, plays that teach about recycling and an elementary program on the environment with materials for teachers. For more information, visit [www.amigosdeislacontoy.org](http://www.amigosdeislacontoy.org).

#### 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 Refugio Aguirre, his son Jesus and their 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). Follow us at [www.facebook.com/cevichetours](https://www.facebook.com/cevichetours) and [www.twitter.com/cevichetours](https://www.twitter.com/cevichetours).

#### 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) or call 631.470.6315 (US)/998.241.3345 (MX).

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