

April 15th

April 15th is the most famous day in America. April 15th is the annual deadline for American citizens to file their income tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service. Every American dreads that day and just hearing the initials “IRS” causes a Pavlovian reaction of fear in most Americans—nobody messes with the IRS. My Dad once told me that when he was living in Tehran, Iran, in 1978, the IRS called him from the American Embassy in Tehran telling him to come to the Embassy and pay \$5,000 in taxes. The top floor of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran was filled with KGB agents while the top floor of the American Embassy in Tehran was filled with IRS agents—hilarious! I’m glad I filed my taxes on time this year, and I’m gladder that I paid all my taxes.

A one-week dive trip to Cozumel, Mexico, was the perfect antidote to forget about tax season. I joined my 20-plus dive buddies from the Sea Ventures dive group in Fairfax, Virginia, for another one-week dive trip. This time we visited Cozumel, Mexico, during the fourth week of April, immediately after April 15th. All of us had our taxes out of the way and we were eager for another week of diving, same as last year when we went to Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles. The diving in Bonaire was great last year, but the food and drink in Cozumel was even better, especially when all meals and unlimited drinks were included in this all-inclusive trip. Mexican food is good. Mexican people are nice. And Mexican entertainment is really fun. America is lucky to have such a nice neighbor south of the border.

We all flew out of Washington Dulles International Airport the same day and transferred planes for the second leg to Cozumel from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in the Southern American State of Georgia. Any trip to Georgia, one of the most Southern of Southern States, forces one to think of the famous Ray Charles song, *Georgia on My Mind*—what a great song. And being in the South might also force one to think of Glen Campbell’s song, *Southern Nights*. (You can listen to either song FREE at <http://www.youtube.com>. Listen to both and you will really feel the soul of the South—Americana at its best.) Even spending only one hour in the airport in Atlanta one can feel the South. Southern and Northern America are completely different from each other. There is something special about the American South—that certain *je ne sais quois* that exists nowhere else in America. Is it the friendly Southern accent? Is it Southern hospitality? The most popular lunch spot at the airport seemed to be T.G.I. FRiDAY’s, and the food at this FRiDAY’s is particularly fresh and delicious. I had a New York steak; my Dad had spare ribs. Sea Ventures thanks Georgia for the nice refresher from Washington, DC, on the way to Cozumel.

When in Georgia, you know that you are in Georgia. When in Cozumel, you know that you are in Cozumel. The April temperature in Cozumel is hot, but that’s perfect since you want to spend all your time in a bathing suit, bikini, or shorts, drinking one margarita after another. That’s the perfect drink after two morning dives so long as you don’t drink and make a night dive that night. Wearing trousers at dinner is requested by the finer restaurants, but no restaurant in Cozumel is going to throw any tourist out because of “proper attire.” Everyone in Cozumel is there to have a good time and be happy. That’s

the only responsibility you have in Cozumel: be happy. Most of the tourists are Americans with a few Canadians and certainly visitors from all over the world. Mexican people are nice to everyone, and if you want to enjoy some of the best diving in the world, Cozumel, Mexico, is the place to do it.

I made twelve dives during the seven days I was in Cozumel: two every morning for five days and two night dives, at twelve different dive sites, all within a 20-minute boat ride from the pier just five minutes from a dozen different hotels. Some of the divers in our group made four dives every day: two in the morning, one or two in the afternoon then one at night. The coral reefs were so colorful and there were more coral reefs to see than there were dives available, though I made the mistake of rubbing against fire coral and my right and left hands were stung by poisonous fibers. That was during one of the deeper dives at 107-feet below. Maybe I was getting drunk on nitrogen at that depth? The red scars on my hands should clear up in about six months. What a wonderful sports injury that serves as a memento on my body to remind me everyday of all the fun I had in Cozumel. I hope the scars stay for a year. And my left ear was a little sore at the end of the week since I hadn't properly equalized on the way down on one dive. At least there was no petechial hemorrhaging from my mask sucking on my face around my eyes, which caused blood to be drawn into the whites of my eyes in the tiny capillaries in my eyes, as happened in Bonaire last year. Bonaire prepared me to be more careful this year. I was careful not to go below 100 feet after that.

Most of our dives were 40 to 60 feet, with a few going to 80-feet underwater. The sand at the bottom was all white. That allowed for a perfect contrast to the blue ocean water color all around us, except for the night dives where it was completely black. Underwater flash lights made vision possible for night dives. We saw a white turtle and several green turtles; four-foot-long sharks; giant lobsters with tails over two-feet long; and the thousands of multicolored fish were so appealing to look at. I had grouper for both lunch and dinner twice, since the sautéed grouper was so tasty at one of the restaurants we ate at. Every meal in Cozumel, except for breakfast, is served with fresh lime. Both the green color and the flavor of lime enhance the flavor of Mexican food.

Night diving was an entirely different adventure. Only moonlight allowed slight underwater vision 10- to 20-feet below. Below that, your dive buddy and your flash light are your only friends: lose either one and you'll surely drift away and never come back. The sea creatures that only come out at night included octopus and giant bright-red spider crabs. The only other place I've ever seen a crab that big was in Hokkaido, Japan. Any crab that size in Japan would sell for maybe USD 500 (about 50,000 yen in Japanese money). Japanese love crab. They call it "kani." This one crab's claws were half the size of a grown man's hand. I cursed myself for having already taken every one of the 36 pictures in my underwater camera. Yes, I still prefer conventional film instead of digital photography. I went back two nights later to the same dive spot for another night dive hoping to see Mr. Giant Red Spider Crab, but I couldn't find him. I guess that means I'll have to go back to Cozumel for another night dive to try and find him again. Maybe he'll invite some of his friends and we can have an underwater party. We can use hand signals to talk to each other. And there surely is communication between humans and sea life

since sea life reacts to human intrusion into their space; show me one human who isn't at least a little afraid when a shark, including a docile shark, swims by. We saw two sharks during our week of diving in Cozumel. No one dared swim towards them, but instead played it cool and let the sharks swim away. I took one picture of one shark from about 10 feet's distance.

Since diving in Cozumel is drift diving and this was my first time drift diving, I had a dive master with me on every dive I made to make sure I didn't drift away to Belize. I had four different dive masters with me—Jaime, Marcos, Leo, and Roman. It's amazing that most everyone in Cozumel seems to speak English (to tell you the truth, many people in the Washington, DC, Metropolitan area don't speak English—it's true). No one in Cozumel is unhappy, frustrated, or upset. No one in Cozumel is arrogant or condescending. Everyone, resident or visitor, has a smile on his or her face. It's great: *¡Viva Cozumel!*

Cozumel is the perfect place for families, couples, or groups. Major cruise lines dock at the port, but to really enjoy diving in Cozumel, a one-week stay at an all-inclusive resort is a must-do for every scuba diving enthusiast at least once in his or her lifetime. I didn't see any Euros floating around, but Mexican Pesos and the US Dollar trade freely among all merchants everywhere in Cozumel. Mexico and the United States are such good friends. America and Mexico like each other, and we want everyone in the world to enjoy North America, and Cozumel deserves its reputation as one of the top-ten tourist destinations in North America. Next time you have "April 15th" in your country, file your paperwork on time, pay your taxes, then visit Cozumel and sip a margarita after your first dive. You'll be glad that you paid your taxes and will be able to put your mind at ease and sweat out the alcohol in your body lying in the warm sun: *¡Olé!*