

Hot this month: Robot concierges, bug cuisine, Belize whale sharks, Skull Island

American Airlines

America's Way

MARCH 2017

**Offscreen,
she's nothing
like the
intense
characters
she plays***

MEET THE REAL JESSICA CHASTAIN

* Unless you're talking animal rights or gender equality. Then she plays serious.

**"IT HURTS,
BUT THEN
IT SHOULD
HURT"**

TAKEN STAR
CLIVE STANDEN
ON DOING HIS
OWN STUNTS

**BEAUTY
AND THE
BEAST GOES
ANTIQUING**

**LOVING
MANCHESTER
HONG KONG'S
SECRET HIKES**

**SYDNEY'S
HIP NEW
FORAGERS
OMG, DTLA**

(Think Downtown
Los Angeles for
the umm...land)



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The world's biggest sharks love caviar

And that's why they congregate in Belize, becoming one of the country's top attractions this month

"TELL YOU THE TRUTH, THE FIRST TIME I SWAM with a whale shark, it was not a pleasant feeling," says Brian Young Sr., founder of Seahorse Dive Shop, the oldest scuba center in Placencia, the narrow peninsula that runs along Belize's south coast. "Honestly, I was terrified."

That was 1990. Young was a fisherman who knew virtually nothing about these shadowy fish that can measure 40 feet long—just that they were big, really big, and probably dangerous. "We thought, for sure they're man-eaters," says Young. Fascinated, he tried to do some research. "But there was nothing—no library, no Google."

He decided to find out for himself at Gladden Split, a popular fishing spot. "I jumped in. The fishermen thought I was crazy. They thought I'd be eaten. And, boy, I didn't forget that feeling."

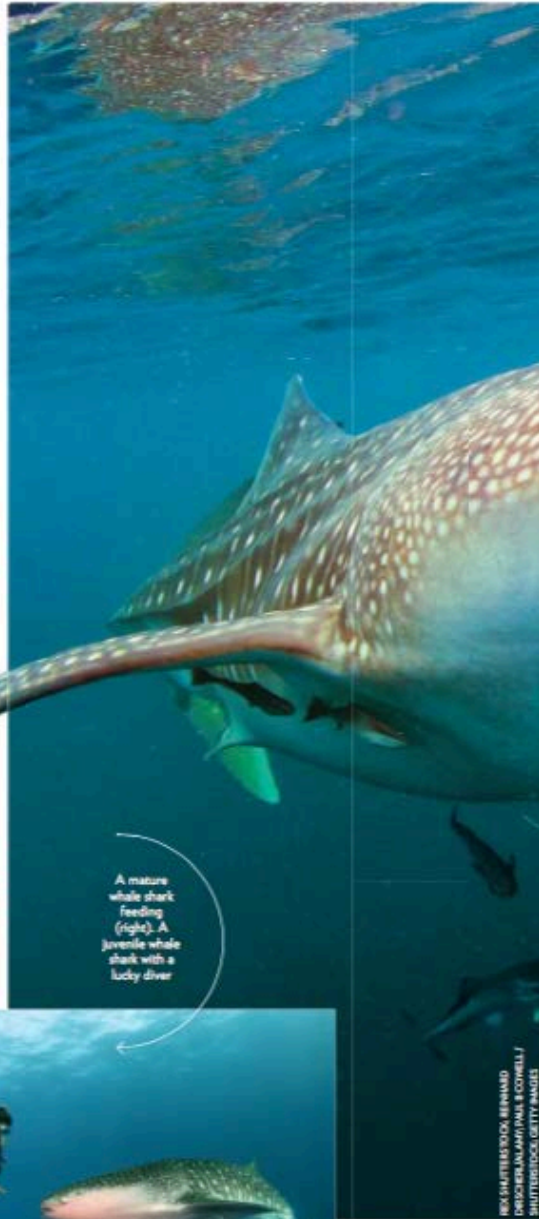
Soon after, in 1994, Young opened Seahorse Dive Shop, the first of its kind to offer whale-shark dives in Placencia. Not an easy pitch, it turned out. Not until he did some underwater filming did people buy in. That evidence helped turn Placencia, a town of just 750 people, into one of the most popular dive sites in the Caribbean.

Sighting season runs March through June, as the leviathans arrive from all over the Caribbean and beyond, drawn to the world's second-largest reef to feed on the eggs of spawning snapper. The most reliable days fall around a full moon. Young concedes the sightings are not an exact science. "A lot depends on when in the month the full moon appears—when I look on the calendar this March [full moon: the 12th], it makes me a little excited: it's either going to be one of those really good years, or just one of those good years," he says. "Nature decides."—ALEX BARLOW belizescuba.com

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PLACENCIA HAS GOOD STAYS, TOO

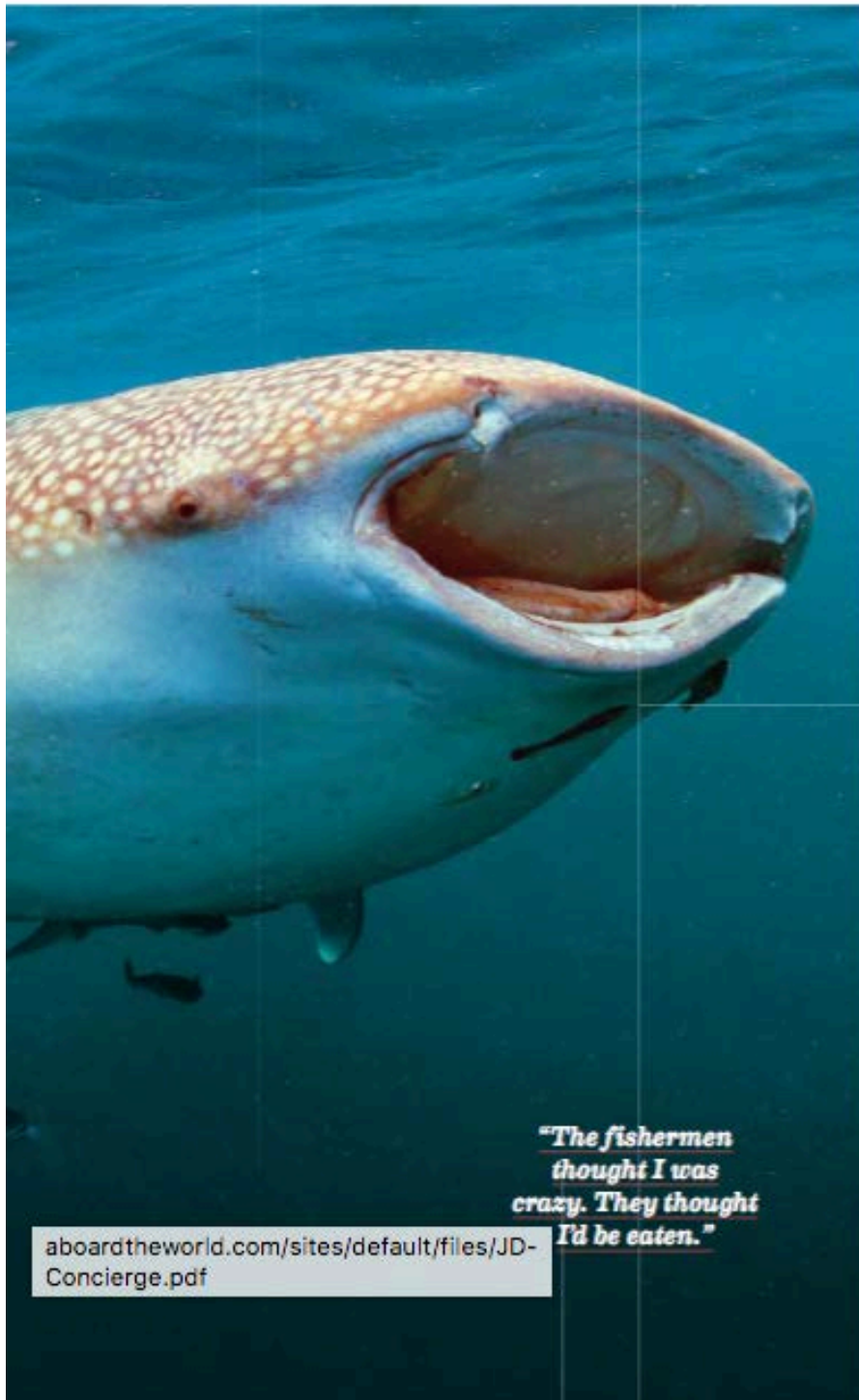
Director-turned-hotelier Francis Ford Coppola fell in love with Belize shortly after filming *Apocalypse Now*, and has two hotels here, including Placencia's Turtle Inn, a forest refuge by the sea that's all thatched huts and Balinese-style furnishings. Sofia Coppola, who's been coming to Belize since she was 10, has said it feels like camping. But the big news this year is the late spring opening of the luxe *Itz'ana Resort and Residences*, with its full-service marina, sea-to-table restaurant and nods to Hemingway and colonial Caribbean estates, designed by Boston-based architect Roberto de Oliveira Castro. Thefamilycoppola.com; itzanabelize.com



A mature whale shark feeding (right). A juvenile whale shark with a lucky diver



REX SHUTTERSTOCK; BERNARD DREIER/ANAT/PAUL SCOTTELL/SHUTTERSTOCK; GETTY IMAGES



***"The fishermen
thought I was
crazy. They thought
I'd be eaten."***

aboardtheworld.com/sites/default/files/JD-Concierge.pdf

THREE MORE AMAZING DIVES



Half Moon Caye, Belize

One of the world's most iconic wall dives, the Half Moon Caye is like diving into a beautiful abyss of loggerhead turtles, eels, rays and barracuda.



Gran Cenote, Riviera Maya, Mexico

One of the world's best cavern dives, you'll see gorgeous rock formations in the clear, shallow waters. It's also a great spot for beginner divers.



Keahole Point, Hawaii

This spot is famous for its huge manta rays, which can have wingspans of up to 16 feet, and night diving, when the rays glide in from the darkness.