

## Jaws this isn't.

By: Ian Stalker

Cancun-based tour company Ecocolors has for the past eight years been hosting people wanting to snorkel alongside whale sharks, the largest fish on the planet, which gather in Caribbean waters near Cancun during the summer to feed on plankton.



And the very big fish are turning into very big business, with company president Kenneth Johnson predicting that this year's

May-September season will see 3,000 people literally take the plunge into Caribbean waters, eager to get a close-up look at the

Beautiful secluded beach beneath cliffs looking over the Gulf of Mexico



harmless creatures in their own watery backyard.

The visitors are lead from boats in pairs by guides to feeding sharks, cautioned beforehand not to touch or otherwise harass the speckled creatures, which are found in a protected biosphere.

Whale sharks – members of the shark family that can reach up to 20 metres in length and whose mouths can reach more than a metre across – aren't aggressive around people, even though size-wise they can dwarf the great white shark of Jaws fame.

"Usually, people are scared just to hear the word shark but after an explanation and briefing most people are happy and excited to snorkel with them," says Johnson, whose company asks prospective clients "Do You Dare [to swim with the massive marine creatures]?"

"We can get totally close to these guys and they're totally harmless," adds guide Chris Lopez, who leads tourists to points where they can literally be face to fin with the sharks.

Ecocolors promises guaranteed sightings of whale sharks during the May-September period.

Johnson says the trip promotes environmental awareness, with clients being familiarized with whale sharks before heading out. Ecocolors runs two courses a year training local guides on "incorporating good environmental practices," he adds.

The whale shark tour boat also stops at another site to allow people to snorkel in shallow water, where they'll see coral and tropical fish.

But Johnson says that, while that may be entertaining, it isn't the equal of being virtually alongside whale sharks in the sharks' own domain.

"I just think snorkeling with the biggest fish in the world is the most exciting adventure you can experience," he says.

More information is available through [www.ecotravelmexico.com](http://www.ecotravelmexico.com).