

Shark Bait

Daredevil Michelle Cove dives into the feeding frenzy

By Scott D. Jones

When you first see Michelle Cove standing on a dock in Nassau, Bahamas, you might think she was a model on vacation from New York, or a college coed looking for some fun. But that impression quickly dissipates as you watch this stunning young woman don diving gear and chain-metal-armored gloves in preparation for her next shark-feeding encounter.

Cove is rare blend of striking beauty, daring and entrepreneurial drive. Her innovative pursuits have helped make Caribbean reef shark feeding an accessible adventure for diving enthusiasts from around the world.

Although Cove, a native Bahamian, has always been drawn to the water, it took some prodding from then future husband Stuart Cove, one of the many instructors and divemasters she met while she was in high school, to get her to try diving with wild, silky sharks in the open ocean.

"Stuart was like a dive god!" says Michelle. "I stayed close to him—probably too close—because he was always into something fun and different."

One day, Stuart suggested that they try to feed some sharks and see what

would happen. Since then, shark feeding has become a multimillion-dollar staple of the Caribbean tourism industry—and an occasionally lucrative business for the Coves through movie work. Last year, for example, Michelle served as Denise Richards' stunt double for the climactic underwater scene in the James Bond film "The World Is Not Enough."

Beyond the film world, Michelle's underwater image has appeared in magazine feature stories and advertisements around the world. As the first woman to regularly feed sharks in the

Photos by Greg Johnston



open ocean, she has quickly become a sought-after expert on the subject.

"I'm not afraid of the sharks, but I do respect them," she says. "There's a magical quality about being down there with them. Once you've been there and fed them, you understand how misunderstood these creatures are. They aren't the monsters attacking humans the media types will tell you they are. They are actually very gentle."

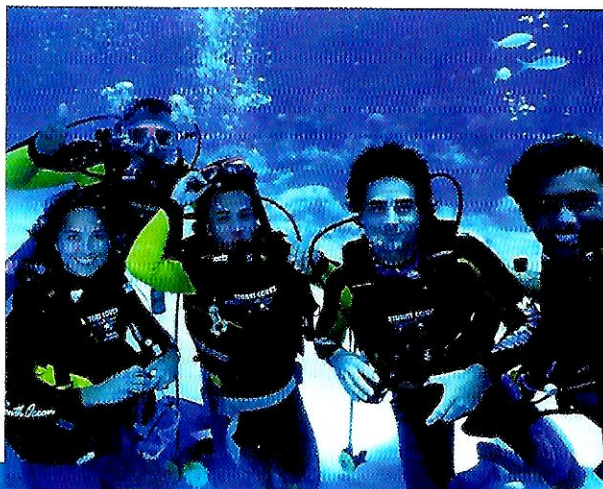
Calm and confident, Michelle Cove helped open the door for a whole new breed of female daredevils. But it didn't happen without a few mishaps. The No. 1 thing she's learned from feeding sharks? "It hurts when they bite."

Recalling a scary incident when a shark mistook her for a piece of

grouper, Cove says, "There was a mix-up with the bait box, and one of them started to bite me on top of the head. Once it realized I wasn't food, he spit me out. I got some stitches and a poor haircut, but that was all."

"How often would you find a beautiful girl who was willing to do this stuff? It was magic," Stuart Cove says of his wife. "She's not afraid to feed sharks in a string bikini, and she actually looks good doing it. Ten years ago, few women were willing to do that. The sport of diving has a lot more glamour today because of Michelle." ●

Want to swim with the sharks? Call (888) 788-2683 to book one of the Stuart Cove Shark Diving Specialty courses in Nassau, Bahamas. The courses are open to certified scuba divers and range from single-day to week-long adventures.



Michelle and The Backstreet Boys during a recent shark feeding adventure. Unfortunately, she didn't use them as bait.

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