

# Tourists wary but not put off after shark attacks in Hawaii

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In this photo, taken on May 8, 2006, a shark bites a piece of fish on a line during a shark-seeing tour 3 miles from Haleiwa, a town on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii. AP Photo/Hugh E. Gentry

MAKENA STATE PARK, Hawaii — There was a record number of shark attacks on people in the islands of Hawaii last year. So Colin Dececco was thinking about sharks when he walked along a beach there.

Dececco and his daughter saw a shark while swimming at Makena's Big Beach on the island of Maui. Later that same day, they watched a fisherman at the same spot at sunset. Suddenly they heard a big splash coming from the fisherman's net.

It was an 8-foot-long tiger shark, one of the fiercest sharks around. The tiger shark is probably responsible for most of the 14 attacks in Hawaii in 2013. Eight of these happened near Makena. The fisherman let go of his net and ran down the shore, shouting for swimmers to get out of the water.

"By then everyone was kind of running," Dececco said. "Tiger sharks — you don't play with them."

## Swimming, But Not Too Far Out

Tourism is a very important business in Hawaii. So the increase in shark attacks has alarmed both visitors and business owners. Two people died in 2013 — a German snorkeler and a kayak fisherman from Washington state. Both attacks happened in the waters near Makena State Park. But there are no permanent signs warning about sharks on the beaches there.

The state posts notices and closes the beach immediately after a shark attack. The beach then stays shut until noon the next day. It reopens once officials on helicopter and jet ski patrols have checked that the shark has left the area. For now, they see no need to change that.

The state government of Hawaii says there is no pattern to the shark attacks. But in 2013 the state announced a new two-year study by the University of Hawaii. This study will look at whether tiger sharks spend more time around Maui beaches than the other Hawaiian islands.

The number of shark attacks increased in Hawaii in both 2013 and 2012. In the three years before that there were just three attacks a year. But, so far, the newer attacks have not affected tourism to the Hawaiian islands. More than 2.1 million people visited Maui last year. The tourists believe that shark attacks are still very rare.

But many swimmers are changing what they do because of the attacks. Some visitors said they will now not swim very far out to sea because they are scared of the sharks.

Karen O'Brien is a 49-year-old tourist from Toronto who said she would only go into the water as high as her waist. Last year, O'Brien snorkeled off the small island of Molokini. Then she read that the kayak fisherman who died was also attacked near Molokini. O'Brien then decided to stop snorkeling there.

## Sharks Hunting Green Sea Turtles?

Hawaii native Lorraine Alesna has long fished at Makena Landing. This is a popular launching spot for kayakers and snorkelers. She shook her head at the tourists who zoomed into the water without paying proper attention.

Sharks produce their babies during the winter months. Attacks on humans are more likely now, so visitors should be more careful. People should also avoid cloudy water that attracts the predators. But, not everybody does.

Alesna said that the tourists have no respect for the ocean or the land. "We grew up knowing what we can and cannot do in certain times of the year," she said. This is not the same for visitors from the mainland United States.

Alesna has lots of theories for the rise in shark attacks. She thinks that sharks might be coming closer to the beach to eat green sea turtles. These turtles were in danger of dying out. Because of this, they were protected by law in 1978. The turtle numbers have since recovered a bit in Hawaii. Alesna says it is now time for officials to allow people to start hunting the turtles again.

But Carl Meyer said there was no evidence to support the theory that turtles are bringing in the sharks. Meyer is an ocean scientist and is leading the University of Hawaii study of the attacks. He says that turtles are just one of many things tiger sharks will eat.

These sharks will swallow anything and everything they find, even things they can't eat. So they are known as the "garbage cans" of the ocean. License plates, oil cans, tires, and baseballs have all been found in the stomachs of tiger sharks.

Many people think there are more tiger sharks in the water now or maybe they are hungrier than before. Meyer doesn't agree with these theories. But the scientist does know that there are more people in the sea than ever before. So he will now look at whether there are more tiger sharks where there are more fisherman, surfers and paddle boarders.