



# The Allure of Lobster Mini-Season

Every year the Florida commercial lobster season ends on March 15th and reopens in early August 1st for traps and harvesting. This little break gives the lobster population a chance to spawn, tend to their eggs, and create the next generation of tasty crustaceans. It also is a time for lobster movement, often from deeper waters, to the shallower reef systems inshore, where food is plentiful and the habitat offers a lot of great hiding places. The last Wednesday and Thursday of July every year are reserved for recreational divers and boaters to get first dibs on all the spiny lobster that have been spawning all spring and summer before the commercial fisheries set their lobster traps. This very special time of the year, as far as the lobster hunters are concerned, is called the 'mini-season'! For two days people from all around the country descend down to Key Largo to try their best efforts at catching Florida Spiny Lobster. Although anyone with a Florida fishing license and crawfish stamp can hunt for lobster Aug 6-March 15th, most non-locals come down only for mini-season. Late July in Florida is a recreational divers Mecca and a frenzy unmatched on the local waterways and reefs during the rest of the year.

For the past seven years, customers of Indian Valley SCUBA (IVS) have traveled from Harleysville, Pennsylvania to Key Largo to take part in Lobster Mini-Season. The size and popularity of the IVS Lobster Mini-Season group has grown steadily over the years starting with just a few people in 2005 to a full boat of 24 divers the past few years. IVS combines the two days of Lobster Mini-Season with the group's usual weekend of Reefs and Wrecks dives with Amoray Dive Resort in Key Largo, and also adds a two-day Florida Keys Wreck Trek from Key West to Key Largo option at the beginning of the week to round out a complete week of summertime diving. The 2011 Edition of the IVS Lobster week included 17 divers on the Wreck Trek, 24 divers for Lobster Mini-Season and over 30 divers for the Reef and Wrecks weekend. The diving conditions all week were a bit windy but manageable for the IVS team. Catching lobster on the shallow reefs off Key Largo was a bit challenging on the bumpy conditions but smaller recreational vessels stayed inland to avoid the rougher seas of the outer reef which meant more lobster to catch for the courageous IVS crew. By Thursday evening, Team IVS captured 172 legal sized lobsters in two days of Mini-Season shattering the group's 2010 record of 107 lobsters and providing the bounty for fantastic annual feast at the Key Largo Conch House.

The Conch House, established in 2004 by Ted & Laura Dreaver, started as the Key Largo Coffee House, and quickly established itself as a great place for a good breakfast. In no time at all, they expanded to lunch & dinner, and at the same time, changed the name to the Conch House to better reflect their all-day fare. Today, with the addition of daughter Stephanie, and sons Justin & John, the family owned Conch House is one of the best restaurants in the Upper Keys due to the establishment's unmatched combination of ambience, unique culinary delights and friendly service. Most often, it's one of the family members who takes care of you while dining at the Conch House. For the annual IVS Mini Season Lobster Feast, the staff of the Conch House graciously takes in hundreds of lobster gathered by the IVS crew and cooks up tasteful dishes of lobster cerviche, lobster fritters and of course broiled lobster tail with drawn butter...Hmmm!! For the 2011 IVS Lobster Feast, the Conch House served up over 150 lobsters with no leftovers to spare. Forty-five hungry people attended the lobster feast including the complete weekend contingent of IVS Reefs and Wreck divers, the owners and staff of Amoray Dive Resort and a few local friends who dive with the IVS crew. Everyone at the annual lobster feast ate like kings and had a fantastic time. The warmest appreciation and thanks go out to the owners of Amoray Dive Resort and the boat crew of the Amoray Diver for making another successful IVS Mini-Season possible. Plus, a big thank you goes out to the professional staff of the Conch House for once again putting together a wonderful annual lobster feast. See you all again next Lobster Mini-Season!