

For several years, marine protected areas of a new kind are increasing throughout the world, especially in tropical seas: sanctuary reserved for sharks. Their goals: to ban fishing and trade of these iconic animals, but also ... to attract admirers. For diving fans, swimming with them is a dream. They are many more people traveling around the planet to observe sharks in their natural habitat.



A study published in 2013 by researchers at the University of British Columbia (Canada) estimates that global "squalophilic" tourism would already represent more than 272 million euros per year, and could generate nearly 725 million euros in twenty years. In the Maldives, it has even been calculated that a live reef shark brought in 2,990 euros each year to the local economy, a hundred times more than the same dead individual, once caught! Such a manna is well worth a sanctuary ...

The shark, a tourist asset?

The idea may come as a surprise to those who quaked in the 1970s, watching Steven Spielberg's "Jaws", or to those that follow the news about the Whitsundays in Australia, where shark attacks "plague" the local economy. fleeing the vacationers of the Great Barrier Reef. However, on a global scale, the evolution is clear: the way people see that predator has changed. His reputation of "man-eater" is not the only one nowadays, it is also qualified of a vulnerable animal, essential to the balance of the oceans ; in which fear gives way to admiration fear to fascination.

Underwater, the shark is the king. First, by age: this group of fish, which are distinguished among others by a cartilaginous skeleton, appeared more than 400 million years ago. The sharks existed well before the dinosaurs and have survived all the major periods of extinction of the species!

Since antiquity, he has earned a reputation as a sea monster

From ancient Greek times, there are stories and engravings of shipwrecked seamen engulfed by "sea monsters" in the Mediterranean. In the Renaissance, scientists who study oceanic species, also retain this ferocious and voracious side of this "dog of the seas", regularly called hungry killer of human flesh. Even Jules Verne describes in 1869, in "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" these "tremendous sharks (...) who grind an entire man in their jaws of iron". Our "Jaws" is finally only the ultimate avatar of a bad reputation that has lasted for centuries!

