



Ace Diving Miami 2026 Annual Lionfish Derby

Protecting Miami's Reefs – One Lionfish at a Time

Saturday, March 15, 2026 • 7:00 AM

Departure: Miami Marina, Miami, FL

Hosted by: Ace Diving Miami

In collaboration with: Zookeeper & FWC Lionfish Control

How It All Started

A few years ago, during what should have been just another beautiful day underwater, something didn't feel right.

Our divers at Ace Diving Miami began noticing more and more lionfish scattered across the reefs. At first, it was just a few here and there. Then it became dozens. Then hundreds. Areas that once held thriving schools of native fish started to feel... quieter.

Instead of ignoring it, a small group of our local divers decided to act.

What started as a simple idea, "*let's go remove a few*", turned into a mission.

In 2023, we organized our very first Lionfish Derby. Just 18 divers showed up that morning. No one knew exactly what to expect. By the end of the day, over **150 lionfish** had been removed from Miami's reefs.

That moment changed everything.

The impact was immediate. The energy was contagious. And the message was clear, when divers come together, we can make a real difference.

Since then, the event has grown beyond anything we imagined. With the support of **FWC Lionfish Control** and conservation leaders like **Zookeeper**, our derby has become a cornerstone event in Miami's dive community.

Now, we're proud to host the **4th Annual Lionfish Derby**, bigger, stronger, and more impactful than ever.





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Why This Matters

Lionfish may be stunning to look at, but beneath their beauty lies one of the most aggressive marine invasions in the Atlantic.

Originally from the Indo-Pacific, lionfish were introduced into these waters decades ago. With no natural predators here, they've multiplied rapidly, and they are relentless hunters.

They consume juvenile fish, shrimp, and critical reef species at alarming rates. In heavily impacted areas, studies have shown native fish populations dropping by **up to 80%**.

That's not just a statistic, that's an entire ecosystem under pressure.

And that's where *you* come in.

This derby isn't just an event. It's action.

- Every lionfish removed gives native species a fighting chance
- Every diver becomes part of the solution
- Every catch contributes to real conservation data used by FWC
- Every participant helps protect the reefs we all love

And the best part? We do it together.

What Derby Day Feels Like

The day starts early, right as the sun begins to rise over the marina.

There's excitement in the air. Tanks being loaded. Gear checks. Friends greeting each other. New faces becoming part of the crew.

At **7:00 AM**, we kick things off with a full safety and strategy briefing. Whether it's your first time hunting lionfish or you've done dozens of removals, we make sure everyone is confident, prepared, and ready.

Then we head out.

Boats cut across calm blue water as Miami's skyline fades behind us. Below the surface, a different world waits.





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Once you descend, it becomes a hunt, but a focused, responsible one.

Lionfish are unmistakable. Their bold stripes and flowing fins make them both beautiful and easy to spot. Divers move carefully, working the reef, staying aware, communicating, and taking clean, controlled shots.

We only use **pole spears or Hawaiian slings**, no hooks, no nets, no damage to the reef. Just precision and respect for the environment.

Each catch is handled carefully. With proper gloves and **Zookeeper containment systems**, divers safely secure their harvest. Yes, lionfish are venomous, but with the right training and awareness, the process is safe and controlled.

Back on the boat, stories start immediately.

“How many did you get?”

“Did you see that huge one under the ledge?”

“You missed one right behind you!”

It’s competitive. It’s collaborative. It’s fun.

Back at the Marina

When we return, the energy ramps up again.

Lionfish are counted, measured, and displayed. Every single one represents a direct impact on the reef.

We celebrate the effort with awards and prizes for:

- Most lionfish caught
- Largest lionfish
- Smallest lionfish

But it doesn’t stop there.

Nothing goes to waste. Lionfish are incredibly delicious, and many are used for **fresh ceviche, tacos, and local cuisine**, while others support education and research efforts.

It’s conservation you can *taste*.





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Who Can Join

This event is open to the entire ocean-loving community:

- Certified scuba divers (Open Water and above)
- Friends, families, and spectators who want to be part of something meaningful

Whether you're in the water or cheering from the dock, you're part of the mission.

What's Included

- Boat dives to prime reef locations
 - Full safety briefing and lionfish identification training
 - Post-event celebration
 - Awards, prizes, and giveaways
 - A chance to directly protect Miami's reefs
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Join Us

Date: Saturday, March 15, 2026

Time: 7:00 AM (boats depart at 8:00 AM sharp)

Location: Miami Marina, Miami, FL

Spots are limited, and every year we sell out.

If you've ever wanted to do more than just dive...

If you've ever wanted to give back to the ocean...

If you want a day that's equal parts adventure, purpose, and community...

This is it.

Ready to make an impact?

Contact **Ace Diving Miami** today to register or volunteer.

Together, we protect what we love.

See you on the water. 

