

Texas State Aquarium swims with fun

A new home for sea turtles is the newest exhibit at the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi.

Tortuga Cay, which opened earlier this year, houses sea turtles that have been rehabilitated after being found sick or injured on Texas shores. Visitors now can see the turtles from above and below the water's surface - better views than at the animals' previous home.

All kinds of other sea creatures inhabit the Texas State Aquarium.

Three of the Aquarium's most popular animals are Atlantic bottlenose dolphins - Kai, DJ and Shadow, who live in the Dolphin Bay exhibit, which covers more than 30,000 square feet and contains about 400,000 gallons of seawater.

The dolphin exhibit features above- and below-water viewing. The underwater viewing area is air-conditioned.

The aquarium also offers visitors the opportunity for a unique experience by living the life of a dolphin trainer. This four-hour private experience is just for visitors and their personal instructors. The program is available on Thursdays from

7:45 a.m. until noon.

As a dolphin trainer for a day, a visitor will make dolphin food, go to dolphin training school, and prepare daily enrichment sessions. The highlights of the program are feeding the dolphins and a private training session where visitors will learn to give hand signals to the animals. Participants must be at least 13 years of age, in good physical shape, able to lift 10 pounds, able to kneel and stoop for extended periods of time, able to traverse narrow rock-work ledges and know how to swim (this is not a swim program, but visitors will be around large pools of water).

The cost for this program is \$250. To register, call (361) 881-1307 or e-mail reserve@txstateaq.org.

Folks can also meet Shadow, Kai and DJ through the Decksides Dolphin Encounter. Visitors can learn dolphin behaviors and have the opportunity to hug, kiss, and shake hands with one of the dolphins. The program is available Fridays through Mondays. Call for times and reservations: 361-881-1307.

The Aquarium also has shows with trained hawks, owls and falcons. The shows showcase



The mysteries of the under sea world are revealed at the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi.

aerial antics of various birds through free-flight performances. The shows, which also feature parrots and exotic small mammals, also are educational, delivering messages on wildlife conservation.

The Aquarium's Living Shores exhibit displays seahorses, shrimp and various kinds of crabs that live in the Laguna Madre and Padre Island areas.

The Amazon exhibit features the diversity of the species

found in the Amazon. The exhibit explains how humans are connected to the wildlife of the rainforests and why this unique natural resource needs to be preserved.

Also at the Aquarium, otters play in and out of the water and greet the guests as they walk past a glass wall that allows visitors to watch every move the animals make in their newly renovated exhibit, Otter Creek.

The Aquarium, at 2710 N. Shoreline Drive, is accessible by U.S. Hwy. 181. From downtown Corpus Christi, take U.S. 181 north across the Harbor Bridge.

Admission is free for members and \$14.95 for those 13 and older. Senior citizens 65 and older pay \$13.50, and children age 3 to 12 pay \$9.95. Children 2 years old and younger are admitted free. Parking is \$3.50.

A limited number of wheelchairs are available for loan, and strollers can be rented.

Hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Aquarium is closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas days.

The Aquarium's phone numbers are (361) 881-1200 and (800) 477-GULF. The Web site is texasstateaquarium.org

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