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‘I DREAM OF DOLPHINS’

New Poll Reveals Majority of American Adults Would Be Interested In Swimming With Dolphins

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Americans are enchanted with dolphins, and a just-released opinion poll shows that 81 percent of U.S. adults aged 18 to 34 would be interested in swimming with dolphins in a safe, legal and permitted environment at a marine life park, aquarium or zoo. The poll was released by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums and conducted by Harris Interactive®.

“Meeting these animals one-on-one is a once-in-a-lifetime dream for many people,” says Marilee Menard, executive director of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums, a 45-member international professional association. “As more families have made this dream a reality as part of their vacation, it seems that word has been spreading about this unforgettable experience.”

Alliance members report that an increasing number of families spend their family vacation swimming, wading, or otherwise interacting with dolphins, as well as beluga whales, sea lions and other marine mammals. Getting in touch with a dolphin in special interactive programs at marine parks has proven an exciting option for family fun. And children aren’t the only ones who rave about these programs; the adults are just as awestruck when they come face to face with a dolphin. In fact, 91 percent of the survey participants agree that interacting with dolphins offers people a deeper understanding and appreciation of this mammal.

Dolphin encounters and other marine mammal interactive programs are offered at Alliance member facilities around the world. And it’s no wonder: these programs are a wonderfully educational, memorable and moving experience for children and adults alike.

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“They know it's going to be fun, and they also come away from the experience with incredible respect for the animals, a new appreciation for the need to conserve our oceans, and a glimpse at the special rapport between the animals and the professionals who care for them,” said Menard.

Different parks and aquariums offer different types of programs involving different animals. Experiences can include interacting with the animals in shallow water, serving as "trainer for a day," or being immersed in the water and swimming with the animals. Interactive programs may involve bottlenose dolphins, beluga whales, seals or sea lions.

"Looking a dolphin in the eye, getting a high-five from a sea lion or smelling the breath of a beluga whale can be truly inspiring," adds Menard. "Marine mammal interactive programs are designed to help people connect with nature in a meaningful way. The ultimate goal at responsible parks and aquariums is to provide a safe, enjoyable and educational experience for families while increasing their understanding and appreciation of these magnificent animals and the need to protect them in the wild."

Eco-wise vacationers should note the important difference between getting to know trained dolphins at a marine mammal park and attempting to feed or swim with wild dolphins in the ocean, which can be harmful for the animals. Government wildlife agencies around the world join in the plea: "For the dolphins' sake, and for your safety, please don't feed, swim with or harass wild dolphins." Feeding wild dolphins disrupts their social groups and threatens their ability to survive in the wild. The U.S. National Marine Fisheries distributes a brochure called "Protect Dolphins: Admire Them from a Distance," which states that "if you want to get up close and personal with dolphins," visit zoos and aquariums.

Methodology

Harris Interactive[®] conducted the study online on behalf of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums between September 16 and 21, 2004 among a nationally representative sample of 1,102 U.S. adults aged 18 and over, of whom 319 were aged 18-34. The data were weighted to be representative of the total U.S. adult population on the basis of region, age within gender, education, household income, race/ethnicity and propensity to be online.

In theory, with samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Sampling error for the adults aged 18-34 results is plus or minus 6 percentage points. This online sample is not a probability sample.

About the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums

The Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (www.ammpa.org) is an international association of marine life parks, aquariums, zoos, research facilities, and professional organizations dedicated to the highest standards of care for marine mammals and to their conservation in the wild through public education, scientific study, and wildlife presentations.

About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive Inc. (www.harrisinteractive.com), the 15th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world, is a Rochester, N.Y.-based global research company that blends premier strategic consulting with innovative and efficient methods of investigation, analysis and application. Known for *The Harris Poll*® and for pioneering Internet-based research methods, Harris Interactive conducts proprietary and public research to help its clients achieve clear, material and enduring results.

Harris Interactive combines its intellectual capital, databases and technology to advance market leadership through U.S. offices and wholly owned subsidiaries: London-based HI Europe (www.hieurope.com), Paris-based Novatris (www.novatris.com), Tokyo-based Harris Interactive Japan, through newly acquired WirthlinWorldwide, a Reston, Virginia-based research and consultancy firm ranked 25th largest in the world, and through an independent global network of affiliate market research companies. EOE M/F/D/V

To locate a responsible marine mammal interactive program near you or in your vacation destination, visit the Alliance Web site at www.ammpa.org.

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