



TIPS FOR CHOOSING YOUR DREAM ENCOUNTER WITH A DOLPHIN

Everyone has a vision of their “dream dolphin encounter,” and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums offers the following tips to help you choose the interactive program that’s best for your family.

- 1) Most parks and aquariums with interactive programs have a minimum age and height requirement. Check the facility’s Web site or call them in advance to determine whether your children are eligible to participate.
- 2) Facilities vary widely on whether they require advance reservations, so familiarize yourself with a park’s or aquarium’s reservations policy. Some require reservations for interactive programs months in advance, while others allow on-site reservations the day you plan to do the program. Keep in mind that group size is limited, so advance planning can be helpful.
- 3) Since a variety of programs are available, make sure you know what you can expect. How many participants are in each session? How much and what kind of contact with the animals is possible? Some programs require you to be a comfortable swimmer; others provide a platform on which you stand, so swimming is not part of the program; and still others take place from a dock so there’s no need to enter the water. For those who wonder how the animals are cared for, there are even “trainer for a day” programs where you can go behind the scenes with the professional animal care staff.
- 4) Make sure ahead of time that a professional animal trainer will be present and actively involved in all interactive programs. This protects both the human and animal participants.
- 5) A thorough orientation session should be provided before beginning the interactive program. This session usually covers the basics of dolphin anatomy, information about how to protect the animals and their habitat in the wild, specific instructions for things you should and should not do while you’re in contact with the animals during the program, and what kind of behavior to expect from the animals.
- 6) Ask whether the park or aquarium is a member of the Alliance for Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. Alliance members are dedicated to the highest standards of care for marine mammals in public display facilities. Membership in the Alliance demonstrates that the facility is committed to maintaining the optimum health and environmental conditions for all marine mammals in its care, and is dedicated to maximizing its educational and scientific efforts.

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To arrange to participate in a marine mammal interactive program or to schedule interviews with Marilee Menard, Executive Director of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums, please call Megan Casper at 312 558-1770, ext. 136.