

Visit to The London Aquarium

I had never visited the London Aquarium before, but because I was so keen to do "Underwater" I decided to give a treat to my sisters and myself by flooding our senses! Aside from the groups of school children and thousands of families eagerly waiting to be allowed inside one at a time, stepping into the aquarium felt, for a moment, like swimming in the ocean. It was fantastic!

The entry is light-hearted to downright goofy...

A guard in misty ostrich feathers keeps the queue orderly in the pleasantest way...

A car complete with sunroof has been turned into a giant aquarium...

Potpourri with citrus rinds is served up in shells...

A videogame's "joystick"? -- a paddle for "riding the rapids"!

Displayed in tanks from floor to ceiling, the London Aquarium is home to hundreds of different varieties of fish and sea life from around the world. The aquarium is split into different displays each of which represents an area of the world's aquatic life including the Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean. The London Aquarium's Pacific Ocean display is 5 metres deep, holds 1 million litres of marine water, and contains tiger sharks, brown sharks, a nurse shark and the only zebra sharks in the UK.

London Aquarium is not only one of the newest and largest aquaria in Europe, but also one of the finest. It is housed in the cellars of the old County Hall right beside the conspicuous London Eye, overlooking the Thames and within sight of the Houses of Parliament, in short the best location for an aquarium you could imagine in London. The house obviously was not built to accommodate an aquarium, but somehow the plan worked, so when you walked around down there you don't feel in any way that it wasn't created for the purpose, - no endless straight corridors with equidistant.

There are 3 floors, but the main parts of the tanks are concentrated on two subterranean floors connected by stairs. In the centre there are basically two large tanks, one (the largest) with Atlantic open sea fauna, the other with pacific (sharks). Around the outer wall (and to some degree also inwards towards the centre) there are smaller aquaria representing just about any water biotope you could imagine. When you enter you first walk through a long tunnel with little to see, -probably to accustom your eyes to the scarce light. Then you arrive at a section describing the history of London as the history of its sewers, with detailed accounts of how the growing pollution of the water affected people's lives. All this is explained on the wall to your right, while a 25 m long stream divided in several sections follows the wall to your left. The following tanks mostly concentrate on temperate waters, though tanks representing the tropical waters soon pop up. When you have closed the circle you walk down the stairs to the bottom level, and here you, among other things, an appended section describing the coral reefs of this planet.

London Aquarium offers you the chance to come face to face with the amazing creatures found under the water and touch rays, starfish and crabs in the seashore and in the ray pool areas!

The creature that surprised me the most was the Moray Eel. The eel was attracting a lot of the visitors, as it was extremely weird and quite amusing. Whenever a person went to get a close view of it, the eel simply just gazed at you and opened its wide mouth as if it was about to eat you!

The creature that frightened me was the ray, as it just appeared rapidly in front of our faces from nowhere. Moreover, I was quite surprised to see clearly the features of it. If you look at the ray in a different point of view you can see a human's face. The ray seems to have lips just like the ones that we have! And it seems to have four eyes, two at the top and two at

the bottom. However, the two holes near the mouth on the underside of the ray are nostrils. Rays use sense of smell to find food.

I have to say that I learnt a great deal about some of the fishes in the aquarium and about the building itself. I have outlined these fascinating facts below:

- The great white shark doesn't chew its food. It rips it up into bite size pieces and swallows it whole.
- For every day of the year there is a species of fish at the London Aquarium.
- If you wanted to travel the world to see all the fish and invertebrates at the aquarium you would cover 38,337 miles.
- Scientists use ear growth rings to determine a fish's age.
- Divers spend the equivalent of 4 days underwater a year.
- The deepest part of the ocean is the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean, reaching a depth of 10,911m.
- It is believed there are around 28,000 different species of fish.
- The aquarium receives the equivalent weight of 9 double decker London Buses in salt annually to make up its seawater.
- Boxfish release poisons into the water when danger approaches. They can even poison themselves if they don't swim away in time.
- The aquarium holds enough water to fill 1/5 of the Albert Hall.
- The smallest ocean in the world is the Arctic Ocean – 5,105,700m².
- Lobsters and Crayfish eat their own shell after mating.
- During an average week an education assistant will get through 30,000 words in talks and tours. They could recite Sergeant Pepper 150 times a week.
- A shrimp's heart is in its head and garfish have green bones.
- Every year the Aquarium has had enough people to fill the Commonwealth Games Stadium in Manchester 24 times.
- The most common name for a goldfish is "Jaws".
- The livestock consume 12 tons of food a year, that's the same weight as 3,800 gold bullion bars.
- Clownfish, cuckoo wrasse, groupers and anthias all can change gender during their life.
- There are over 400,000 litres of water behind the scenes that house over 40 species.
- Lungfish have developed a lung from their air bladder in order to survive out of water.
- The largest fish is the whale shark, which grows to 15m long and weighs over 20 tonnes!
- The oceans sunfish lays the most eggs of any fish; over 300 thousand in one go!
- A tuna can swim 100 miles in a single day!
- The aquarium produces 30,000 litres of seawater every week.
- The River Thames has over 110 different species of fish and invertebrates living in it and new ones are discovered annually.
- To relieve the pressure on Atlantic cod – buy cod that is marked "line caught fish from Icelandic & Norwegian waters".
- Currently in the UK only 4% of expenditure on food is on fish.
- Wild stocks of Atlantic salmon have decreased by 50% in the past 20 years – To stem the trend buy salmon that is labelled "responsibly or organically farmed".

- In a year divers descend 1300m, comparable to stacking Canary Wharf on top of itself 5 times.
- Fish that live in the depths of the oceans produce luminescent bacteria.
- The smallest fish in the world is only 8mm long – dwarf pygmy goby.
- When two male lobster's fight they urinate on each other to mark their opponent to ensure they don't fight each other again.
- 60% of fish consumed by EU members is now imported from the waters of the southern hemisphere.
- In the last year Emma Thompson, Ronan Keating, Julia Roberts, Kate Winslett, Halle Berry, Jonathon Ross, Harry Enfield, Marcel Desailly, Vic Reeves and Dr. Fox have all visited the aquarium.
- Dolphins can dive down to 300m and jump up to 6m out of the water.
- There are around 5000 species of crabs. Crabs walk sideways.
- A great white shark can go around 2 months without a feed.

SEAHORSES

Seahorses are one of the most popular species at London Aquarium. Cute and elegant, the seahorse has unique features and characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other sea life.

There are two types of seahorse that can be seen at London Aquarium, Hippocampus Erectus (the Lined Seahorse) and Hippocampus Reidi (the Slender Seahorse).

A less well known fact about the seahorse is that once they have met their mate, they stay with them for a long time and if their partner should leave, it takes them a very long time to find another to breed with. This particular aspect of their nature makes them very sensitive to over fishing and extraction by seahorse admirers. Hence the reason why regulatory and protective bodies are getting involved and are taking action to preserve them.

Everything You Need To Know About The Seahorse

History: Seahorses have been in existence for around 40 million years.

Family Background: Seahorses are members of the Teleost suborder, or bony fish, and belong to the teleost group, meaning they have an interior skeleton.

Male Mums: Out of the entire animal kingdom, seahorses are the only species in which the male gives birth. The female passes her eggs into the male's "marsupial-style" pouch (like a kangaroo's) where they are fertilised.

Large Families: Each male can produce up to 200 babies. Once the young are born, seahorses can mate and procreate again almost immediately.

Different Varieties: There are 33 different classifications of the seahorse, all now covered by the new international trade rules to protect the species.

Eye-Eye: Each eye of a seahorse moves independently from the other.

Colourful: Seahorses vary in colour, including shades of yellow, orange, red, grey, and green. They are also able to change colour to blend in with their surroundings. Some have patterns like "zebra stripes" or spots.

Diet: Seahorses feed on small living animals like daphnia, cyclops, larvae of water insects, or mysids. They have no teeth and swallow their food whole.

Fins: Small dorsal fins propel the seahorse through the water in an upright position, while it beats them back and forth, almost as fast as a humming bird flapping its wings. The pectoral fins control turning and steering.

Tag-team: Seahorses like to swim in pairs linked by their tales.

Mating: Seahorses are romantics. They are loyal and mate for life and are known to mate under a full moon uttering musical sounds.

Size: The height of a full-grown seahorse can vary between 2-8 inches (i.e. 5 - 20cms).

Natural Anchor: When resting, the seahorse curls its tail around seaweed, to stop it floating away.

Watch your back! Natural predators of the Seahorse are crabs, tuna, skate and rays.

Home Waters: Seahorses usually live in the tropics or along temperate coasts, which is why it was a surprise to find one in the Thames estuary.

JELLYFISH

Jellyfish are amazing creatures that have survived more than 650 million years of the Earth's history and can be found in every ocean and sea.

There are roughly 200 jellyfish species including Elegant Jellyfish, Umbrella Jellyfish, the West Coast Stinging Nettle, Lion Jellies and Moon Jellies. Jellyfish have no spine or brain. They are related to both coral and sea anemones, but they can be beautiful creatures full of colour and wildly varying shapes. The Moon Jelly can be found in large swarms of other jellyfish that feed on plankton. Lion Jellies can have tentacles sometimes longer than a whale, while Umbrella Jellies are only an inch wide and can live in warm and cold waters.

Jellyfish move through the ocean waters with pulsating bodies that are comprised of 95% water, protein and mineral salts. Jellyfish can be as small as a pencil eraser or have tentacles that reach 100 feet from their squishy bodies. Of the 200 jellyfish species, 70 of them produce stinging cells that can sting a human being. Small poison filled cells are ejected when a jellyfish comes into contact with another organism. Jellyfish are predators of shrimp and other small marine animals; they use their stinging ability to stun their prey.

By the end of our visit I was pleased and proud of myself that I had made an excellent decision of exploring "Underwater" as the aquarium gave me a lot of ideas for the theme, "Underneath and Overhead". I was satisfied I had seen what I planned to and was glad to see my sisters enjoying themselves too. It is not cheap to visit the London Aquarium, but it is worth every penny. Nowhere else in London can visitors come face-to-face with sabre-toothed sharks, encounter a frenzied piranha feed, and stroke friendly rays and starfish.