

# Sea To See

By Joquita Burka

*They swim back and forth, and you stare in a sort of hypnotic trance--fascinated by their movements and their colorful beauty. You'd love to get up close to piranha, eels and sharks--without the danger. You are the perfect candidate for either of South Carolina's two aquariums.*

The South Carolina Aquarium is located at 100 Aquarium Wharf, (where else?) right on the waters of Charleston Harbor. Even before you enter the aquarium, you'll begin to enjoy the beauties of the sea. Ships and pleasure boats dot the harbor waters and dolphins swim alongside the aquarium in the Cooper River.

However, once inside visitors will be taken to the aquatic areas far beyond those of the immediate area. Designed as an educational institution to display and interpret the area's rich waters, the South Carolina Aquarium features displays on the Mountain Forest, Piedmont, Coastal Plain and off-shore habitats entitled "The Ocean." A new exhibit called "Secrets of the Amazon" goes far beyond the state to take visitors deep inside the sights and sounds of the Amazon rainforest.

With its educational focus, the South Carolina Aquarium often hosts special learning events, festivals, and programs for children and adults. And it sits amid some of the city's favorite places. Just a few minutes from the historic district, Aquarium Wharf also is home to the Charleston IMAX Theater, Fountain Walk Retail Shops and the National Park Services' Ft. Sumter Interpretive Education Center, with docks

for the Ft. Sumter Tours.

Up the coast in Myrtle Beach is a whole other sea experience: Ripley's Aquarium. Located at the very popular Broadway at the Beach, Ripley's Aquarium is a combination of discovery and fun.

Exhibits vary from local Atlantic species and the Pacific giant octopus to Indopacific tropical fish, ancient horseshoe crabs and the red-bellied piranhas of the Amazon River basin. The aquarium also features a changeable exhibit area, hourly dive shows, daily marine science classroom presentations, special marine science education camps and an interactive educational Discovery Center.

Two other areas seem particularly popular. Friendship Flats is a shallow lagoon area for the inhabitants of Ray Bay. Who can resist putting a hand on a ray or shark when you feel (relatively) sure that you won't be maimed? In the Dangerous Reef, a moving walkway takes you through a 330-foot "glass tunnel" as you are surrounded on three sides by aquarium walls. Though you are separated from the fish by some six inches of clear polymer, the effect is at first unnerving then wonderful. Sharks circle overhead. Sawfish appear to be headed your way. Green moray eels slither in and out of the rocks. And you'll find yourself ducking as sea creatures head toward you.

Just as the South Carolina Aquarium is surrounded by great destinations, Ripley's Aquarium is in the middle of Broadway at the Beach. This Myrtle Beach hot spot just off Highways 17 and 501 is filled with enough shopping, entertainment and dining to keep the whole family amused for hours. And if you can have fun--and learn something in the process--why not give it a try.

## Find out more...

South Carolina Aquarium  
843-720-1990  
[www.scaquarium.org](http://www.scaquarium.org)

Ripley's Aquarium  
843-916-0888  
[www.ripleysaquarium.com](http://www.ripleysaquarium.com)