



Exhibits

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THE WILD REEF REVEALS UNDERWATER MYSTERIES OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S PREEMINENT CORAL REEFS

CHICAGO —Be transported to a world hidden in the sea, a place imbued with allure and wonder. There is no other place in the world's oceans as diverse as a reef in the Philippines, and guests to Shedd Aquarium's *Wild Reef* will get a diver's-eye view of this lush ecosystem.

Experience the otherworldly mystery of diving the waters of a coral reef—including face-to-face encounters with nature's perfect predator: sharks. Faint-hearted guests are warned they may find themselves only inches away from more than 25 sharks in a curved-overhead 400,000-gallon habitat. With more than 2,000 fish and a million tiny coral polyps, the *Wild Reef* teems with life.

"*Wild Reef* is Chicago history in the making, and it's one of the most exciting things to happen at Shedd," said Shedd Aquarium President and CEO Ted Beattie. "*Wild Reef* brings one of North America's largest and most-diverse shark habitats to the shores of Lake Michigan and furthers Shedd's prominent position as an innovator and leader among the world's aquariums."

Guests journey 25 feet below street level to be greeted by crashing waves, the smell of saltwater and an intensely colorful array of aquatic life that encompasses the coral reef. A re-creation of Apo Island, an Indo-Pacific island in the Philippines, the *Wild Reef* unveils the animals, biodiversity and cultural connection behind this unparalleled marine ecosystem.

Eight years in the making, the *Wild Reef* is Shedd's largest exhibit opening since the Oceanarium in 1991. The 10-room, \$45 million exhibit is within a new 28,000-square-foot underground wing and contains 750,000 gallons of seawater, more than doubling the original aquarium's capacity.

"I know I speak for my countrymen in Illinois when I say that we are elated and thankful to Shedd Aquarium for bringing a piece of the beauty of the Philippines to Chicago," said Philippine Consul General Emelinda Lee-Pineda. "It is our hope that through the *Wild Reef* exhibit, the millions of visitors who visit Shedd will appreciate the fact that the Philippines is the epicenter of the world's marine diversity and that the country, with all its unique and wonderful attractions, deserves to be visited as a tourist destination."

Fins and Jaws and Teeth ... Oh, My!

"Sharks capture our dreams—and sometimes our nightmares. They are the product of millions of years of evolution, perfecting their predatory skills and creating the ocean's most efficient killer," said George Parsons, director of aquarium collections at Shedd. "Sharks are a mystery and their secrets come to life on the coral reefs where they live, especially those surrounding the Philippines."

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Dubbed “devils from the sea,” sharks have long conjured a mythic fear among landlubbers and seafarers alike. The *Wild Reef* will dispel the myths and explore how sharks fit into our imaginations and into our ecosystems.

A 400,000-gallon shark habitat—nearly five times the size of Shedd’s Caribbean Reef exhibit—gives visitors the chance to experience the power and speed of “nature’s eating machine.” More than 25 sharks will reside in the new exhibit, including blacktip reef, whitetip reef, wobbegong and sandbar. Other large reef fish, such as a 150-pound Queensland grouper and a 100-pound Napoleon wrasse, who can hold their own or stay out of the way, will share the habitat.

Wild Reef Teems with Aquatic Life

Gaze in awe at the largest public display of corals in the Midwest, and learn coral—believed by many to be a plant—is an animal. Your appreciation of coral—often called the “rainforests of the sea”—will be re-shaped as you learn this miniscule creature is the foundation of the reef ecosystem. Without coral, reef animals cease to exist.

Electrifying in their diversity and dazzling in their colorful reef home, 540 species of aquatic life—from rays to flashlight fish—call the *Wild Reef* home. As schools of fish duck in and out of the coral caves, divers swim overhead, moving throughout the Schooling Fish/Mid-Predator habitat.

The Art of Transporting Visitors to the Philippines

While the Philippines may be thousands of miles from Chicago, Shedd has been able to re-create an authentic corner of the island chain—from its marine diversity to the mangroves, the coral reefs to the lush beaches. Shedd took painstaking steps to ensure the authenticity of the exhibit. For instance, Filipino people handmade the community center, dismantled it and shipped it to Shedd where it was re-assembled. Shedd also imported 17.5 tons of sand from the Philippines to create a natural seabed in the shark habitat.

The aquarium has taken the utmost care to create an exhibit that accurately represents the Philippines and upholds Shedd’s exacting “best practices” standards. Throughout the eight years of planning, Shedd staff conducted five research trips to the Philippines and worked with an advisory council of Filipino people living in Chicago.

“Apo Island serves as a wonderful real-life example of a community that has learned to conserve its natural resources and prosper economically,” said Bert Vescolani, vice president of aquarium collections and education at Shedd Aquarium. “Shedd’s overarching goal is to educate visitors about conservation. We hope the *Wild Reef* will inspire visitors to learn more about the world’s ocean habitats and the importance of conserving them.”

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Apo Island is a 183-acre volcanic island in the central region of the Philippines and has an important environmental story. More than 20 years ago, the coral reefs surrounding Apo Island were nearly fished out and destroyed. A community-based conservation program that began in the 1980s helped preserve and restore the ecosystem. *Wild Reef* takes visitors through that conservation process, allowing them to see the amazing beauty of the endangered reefs and how they can play a part in keeping it alive. Guests get a glimpse into island life and how the islanders and animals live in harmony, both depending on the health of their habitat.

The Master Plan

The *Wild Reef* exhibit is the cornerstone of Shedd's current exhibit master plan. This long-term exhibit plan focuses on bringing to Shedd six distinct regional aquatic ecosystems: The Pacific Northwest coast, Illinois waters, East African lakes and rivers, Florida Everglades and the Caribbean reefs, the Amazon River, and Indo-Pacific coral reefs. *Wild Reef* is the Shedd's Indo-Pacific coral reef exhibit.

Early in the planning stages for the exhibit, aquarium leaders formed an advisory group to solicit input from the Filipino community. The group's contributions helped make the exhibit come alive through its relevancy, authenticity and ability to help Shedd guests and Chicago's Filipino community better understand this place and its people.

The *Wild Reef* is the culmination of a 5-year, \$97 million renovation and expansion program that included not only the building of the new wing but other necessary renovations to the aquarium. Funding largely was made possible by *The Next Wave: The Fund for Shedd*—a \$47.5 million fund-raising campaign. In addition to support from the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois, many individuals, corporations and foundations helped this campaign achieve remarkable results during the last few years.

*Shedd Aquarium is supported by the people of Chicago through the Chicago Park District.
Chicago residents are eligible to receive discounted admission*