

PLAYFUL PENGUINS CELEBRATE OPENING OF ANTARCTICA AT MELBOURNE AQUARIUM

Melbourne Aquarium today officially unveiled its new \$28 million Antarctica expansion, which features Australia's only collection of sub-Antarctic penguins and offers an amazing insight into the world's last frontier of science, research and adventure.

The world-class Antarctica expansion, which positions Melbourne Aquarium as a must-see Australian tourism attraction, was the catalyst for a significant upgrade of the existing exhibits and a refreshed offering that delivers an ever greater value for money experience. Along with Antarctica, there are four amazing worlds to discover at Melbourne Aquarium – Weird and Wonderful, River to Reef and Sharks Alive.

The stars of the show are two species of sub-Antarctic penguins. The collection of birds includes five King Penguins, who stand almost 1 metre tall, and thirteen Gentoo Penguins that are smaller in stature but certainly not lacking in personality.

The penguins were obtained through aquarium-bred stocks from Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World in Auckland, New Zealand. They made the trip across the Tasman Sea on board a temperature-controlled air freighter.

The natural environment of the penguins has been meticulously recreated by employing the following innovative technologies and state-of-the-art features:

- A temperature controlled environment that can be set a different levels between minus 10 and plus 5 degrees Celsius
- A light cycle that changes to replicate the Antarctic seasons, with very short days in winter and very long days in summer
- The creation of tons of snow and ice everyday to refresh the exhibit's base
- A 100,000 litre pool that is a constantly chilly 7 degrees Celsius; and
- A fully functioning Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) approved facility – another example of the commitment to the welfare of the animals.

Melbourne Aquarium's Bird Curator, Tristan Bird, said that each of the penguins has a distinct and strong personality and they display characteristics that you would not find in any other bird species.

"The Gentoos are active little characters with an amazing supply of energy. They have curious and outgoing personalities and are happy to investigate and interact with anything new. They are also very vocal – often calling out to each other with a honking sound or singing together in a loud chorus.

"Contrastingly, the Kings are the more regal and majestic of the two species. They can sometimes be quite aloof in nature and they tend to stick together in a group, ignoring their cheeky Gentoo neighbours. They

are probably the more visually stunning of the species and their vibrant yellow-orange colouring makes them mesmerizing animals to watch. Three of the Kings are actually moulting at the moment, which is an annual process of changing over feathers that lasts for a 6-8 week period," Mr Bird said.

The supporting act to the penguins is a collection of stunning visuals and interactive experiences that convey everything there is to know about the coldest, windiest and driest continent in the world. From experiencing the life of an explorer to learning about how scientists live on the continent now, visitors will be amazed and enthralled at the rich history culture and scientific discovery.

In delivering this amazing exhibit, Melbourne Aquarium has formed a close working relationship with the Australian Antarctic Division and the alliance is committed to:

- Developing and maintaining an informative and educative experience at Melbourne Aquarium
- Promoting an understanding of the role and value of Antarctica to ensure that it is valued, protected and understood; and
- Facilitating scientific access and research opportunities through the programs of both parties.

Melbourne Aquarium General Manager, Rob Taranto, said the development reaffirms Melbourne Aquarium as the most exciting tourism attraction in Victoria.

"Antarctica at Melbourne Aquarium is a completely unique experience for Australia - as it is the only venue in the nation to feature sub-Antarctic penguins. It is the largest development at our venue since opening in 2000 and will deliver an additional dimension to our offering that is amazing and enriching for our visitors.

"In addition, Melbourne Aquarium has signed a Memorandum of Understanding and formed a partnership with the Australian Antarctic Division and will continue to draw on this strategic relationship to deliver unique opportunities for visitors," Mr Taranto said.

The Antarctica expansion has doubled the footprint of Melbourne Aquarium to approximately 6,000 square meters. It includes enhanced retail, food, beverage and educational facilities and provides additional floor-space for its Five Star Functions business, allowing guests the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dine with the penguins.

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