

# OdySea Aquarium

Aquarium in the Southwest offers a rare peek at ocean life.



By Julie Carlson

## ODYSEA AQUARIUM

odyseaaquarium.com  
(480) 291-8000  
9500 Via de Ventura, Scottsdale

Open Sunday through Friday  
from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and  
Saturday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Daily tickets are \$34.95 for adults,  
\$24.95 for children (3 through 12),  
\$29.95 for students (13 through 17)  
and \$32.95 for seniors.  
Children under 2 are free.



After a much anticipated wait, OdySea Aquarium is now open. Holding more than two million gallons of water and fascinating marine life from around the globe, this two-story facility offers visitors an intimate and rare peek inside our planet's oceans.

Located on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community within the OdySea in the Desert complex, the building and exhibits were designed by Deutsch Architecture Group. The aquarium is just one of the attractions in the 37-acre multi-million dollar entertainment district.

The aquarium's exterior features tilt panels created by SRPMIC artist Jacob Butler, providing influences of Native American culture and heritage. The panels are divided into sections with individual meaning: rain falling, the ocean, and the earth. The Pima Indian tradition of basket weaving is also incorporated, like the exterior panels on Butterfly Wonderland, located in the same complex.

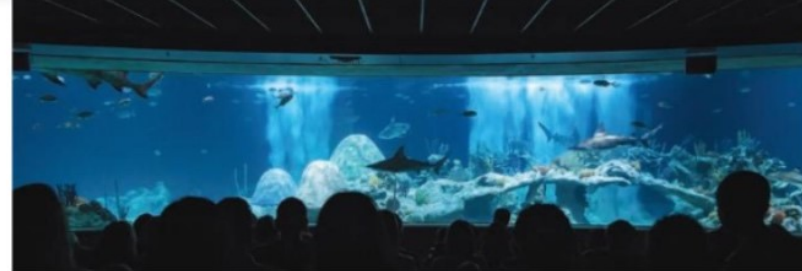
Founded by Amram Knishinsky, PhD, a real estate developer who created the first nonprofit aquarium in the United States in Kentucky and the OdySea Experience at the Mohegan Sun Casino in Connecticut, his new aquarium in Scottsdale is headed under the direction of General Manager Greg Charbeneau. He brings 28 years of experience in zoological operations, theme parks, and aquariums from the Atlantis Resort in the Bahamas, Sea World, Walt Disney World, and Epcot.

Once visitors step inside OdySea, they will feel as if they've entered the underwater world of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. OdySea is both visually stunning and educational for the whole family.

OdySea contains over 30,000 animals and 500 species. Upon entering, visitors can take in the sights of the Aqua Lobby, where giant orbs of fish are suspended from the ceiling. Continue your journey to the Sharks of the Deep exhibit via an escalator surrounded by acrylic glass that creates a feeling of being submerged deep inside the heart of the ocean. Sponsored by Cox Communications, the exhibit features rescued sea turtles, spotted eagle ray, whitetip reef and scalloped hammerhead sharks.

Throughout the aquarium, Animal Care team members are on hand to answer questions as part of the Animal Ambassadors program. "Our Animal Ambassadors include multiple types of species that all play an important role in the environment worldwide," says Charbeneau. "The program was designed to enhance the awareness of species and habitat conservation."

OdySea is a proud partner with the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds. The 200,000-square-foot facility features over 50



**Julie Carlson**  
freelance writer  
aspiring screenwriter

exhibits such as: American Rivers with water turtles, endangered Apache trout, and baby Siamese crocodiles; Rainforest Rivers with Amazon marine life like true piranha, archerfish, and big tooth river rays; Otter Banks with Asian small-clawed otters who have their own special signs of communication; Tide Touch Pool featuring a 37-foot long touch pool holding more than 2,000 gallons of water with sea cucumbers, sea stars, hermit crabs, and more; Penguin Point, which opens with animatronic guides Pip and Polly to answer questions and invite you to get up-closer and personal with live South African penguins; Reef Jewels displaying the "jewels of Caribbean" such as clown fish, sea horses, and giant jawfish.

As for how the marine life came to live in the aquarium: "It's a planes, trains, and auto-

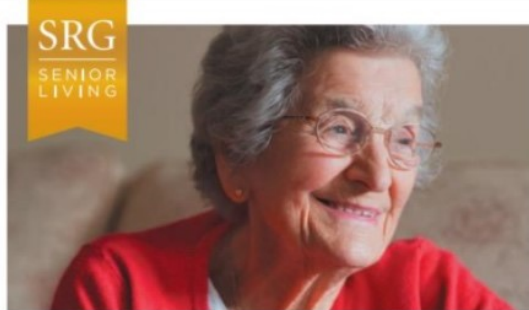
mobiles process depending on the location in the world and the type of exhibit," explains Knishinsky. "Our staff takes care to be involved in the transportation and oversees the delivery of animals to their new home."

Want to experience what it's like to be on the other side of the glass? OdySea features an unique adventure called SeaTREK. Developed by SubSea Systems, the exhibit lets visitors wear a wetsuit and special helmet to plunge eight feet into the aquarium. No scuba diving certificate is required. Visitors are accompanied by a trained and certified SeaTREK safety instructor and watch a five-minute safety briefing before hand.

OdySea also has a 90 minute behind-the-scenes tour. Both encounters are separately priced from general admission. Reservations for the tour and SeaTREK are required, so plan ahead.

There's also a 200-seat 3D theater showing a film called *Under the Sea*, as well as the nautical-themed OdySea Cafe, presented by Coca-Cola. The cafe offers treats from artisan brioche, gourmet burgers and refresher drinks.

So far, Charbeneau says he's received positive feedback from guests about the interactive experience. The Living Seas Carousel, Escalator, Great Barrier Reef, and shark bathtubs. He says the areas are a hit because they allow visitors to experience the ocean in a new way.



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