

Marine Connection report Dolphin Bay, Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai



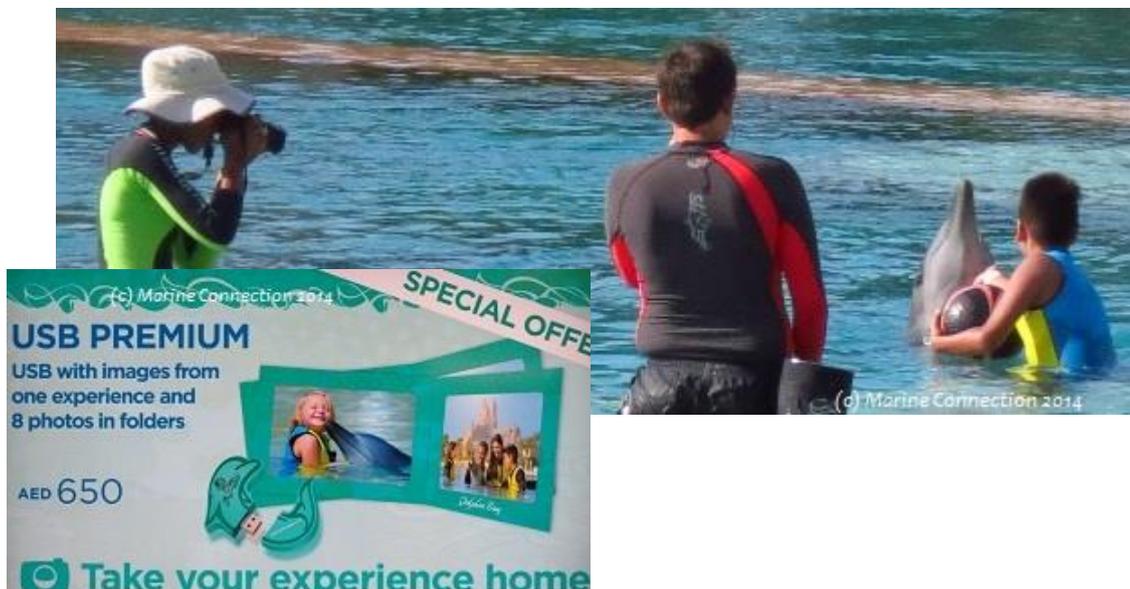
Location

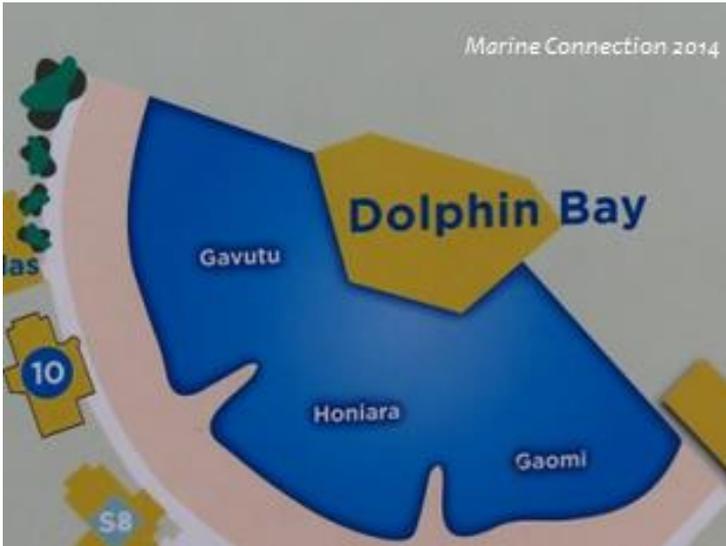
The Atlantis Resort is located at Crescent Road on the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai with Dolphin Bay situated just behind the resorts' Sandance Beach. The Palm Atlantis is very popular with package holiday companies and tour operators worldwide including [Virgin Holidays](#) and [Thomas Cook](#).

About Dolphin Bay *

There is no direct access into Dolphin Bay unless you are purchasing a 'Dolphins Experience' ticket (either Dolphin Encounter (AED 610-660), Dolphin Adventure (AED 850-900), Atlantis Royal Swim (AED 950-1,000) or Dolphin Scuba Dive (AED 1,350-1,400) – for an extra AED 425 you can include a 'Dolphin Photo Fun' experience to have your photograph taken with the dolphins. Observer Passes can also be purchased (AED 100 for hotel guests / AED 300 for visitors), however these are only sold to those accompanying someone who has purchased a dolphin experience and are not sold separately. Dolphin Bay ticket holders can also gain admission to use the Aquaventure Waterpark within the price of their ticket. It is possible to 'upgrade' tickets (for an extra AED 75) which allows access to the Lost Chambers Aquarium – where Atlantis displays over 65,000 marine animals.

* Approx prices per person in AED at time of compiling report





It felt bad taste in the extreme to find that the interaction pools all have names related to the Solomon Islands or the surrounding area (being Gavutu, Honiara and Gaomi) – a sad reminder of where the dolphins originated from. The area itself has three pools, each divided by a concrete walkway/wall. On the day of observation, all pools were in constant use, ranging between 3–8 dolphins in each pool area with approx 30 participants in each one. Observers not participating were given the option of using the sun loungers/deck chairs on the sandy beach area to watch those interacting with

the dolphins; however 99% of people per session were in the water. The facility tries to give their customers the feeling of a natural lagoon setting but it's far from a natural setting.



Background



28 wild-caught dolphins were removed from the waters around the Solomon Islands, and transferred to the Palm Atlantis on 17 October 2007. Since that time Marine Connection and various colleagues worldwide have had concerns over the welfare of the dolphins as several were reported to have died from the original import. There had also been reports of calves being born in the interim; therefore the purpose of this visit was to check the details. We found that there are currently 26 dolphins, including two calves, at this facility.



The Dolphin Bay experience

Access to behind the performance area could not be gained to check the holding/medical pools, fish preparation or medical areas.

Although the pre-interaction talk by the head trainer was in some way informative - telling swimmers where not to touch the dolphins and to remove jewellery (we noted not something that all the trainers followed themselves), plus a small section regarding dolphin anatomy and physiology, this was very basic and did not promote conservation. During the talk, participants were told the dolphins originated from the Solomon Islands and that they had been 'rescued'. We questioned several following their interaction, asking if it would deter them from participating had they known they were actually captured not rescued, they said possibly.

The actual interaction programme was sadly predictable and demeaning. Trainers urged participants to kiss, dance and even at one point hold the dolphin completely out of the water.



For the 'one to one' part of the group sessions participants were asked if they wanted to (a) dance with (b) kiss and hug or (c) play fetch with the dolphins. Once the choice had been made the dolphins were made to perform the actions instructed by the trainer.



There were several instances where one trainer appeared to pull the dolphin backwards in the water. It was not clear whether this was to control the dolphins' movements and direct it to where the participants were waiting to interact, it was, however an obvious obstruction of the dolphins' natural pattern. Added to this were the usual trainer instructions to get the dolphin to splash participants and in our viewpoint the programme could not be termed educational in any way.



Daily visitor numbers to Dolphin Bay range from 500-900. Despite selling themselves as 'one of the most sophisticated dolphin habitats in the world', provides no cover/shelter from the severity of the sun for the dolphins within the interaction area - despite the fact the temperature on the day we visited was in excess of 95°F/35°C. This is very concerning given dolphins susceptibility to sunburn. In the wild, dolphins would not remain on the surface for any great length of time, but during the interaction, dolphins were on or near the surface constantly. During our time there, it was not clear how often the dolphins are 'exchanged' in the interaction area, certainly no exchange of dolphins occurred during the time the observation was taking place - which was over a four hour period.



In one pool area, once the interaction was finished and swimmers had left the water, two dolphins were observed constantly chasing another into the shallows - resulting in the individual dolphin eventually remaining in one area of the pool, away from the two pursuers. It was very concerning to note that one dolphin in particular repeatedly breached near the stone wall surrounding one area of the pool. It would leap out of the water and land on its' side 5-6 times in succession. Following this, the other dolphins were seen to simply swim backwards and forwards near the waterfall area, behind which is the pool holding the remaining dolphins, as less than half were used in the interaction programmes split between the three pool areas.

Conclusion

Despite their claims Dolphin Bay at Atlantis, The Palm provides no real 'educational' value. Certainly nothing to assist the conservation of dolphins can be learned from these interactions. Dubai is currently very keen to expand its' tourism base. Marine Connection uncovered there are plans afoot to expand or add to the current dolphin facilities in Dubai, although we are not presuming this to be the case with Atlantis currently. However other facilities visited in Dubai such as Creek Park are currently expanding and building more pools. They have just celebrated the birth of a young calf and are certainly keen to ensure they provide visitors with a larger dolphin attraction.

The only way forward to stop the demand for dolphins is to encourage people 'Not To Buy A Ticket'

Large tour operators (most notably [Virgin Holidays](#)), but also [Thomas Cook](#) (who also sell the dolphin experience to their customers) and describe Dolphin Bay as "one of the largest dolphin enclosures in the world". Considering Dolphin Bay holds 26 dolphins, the area provided per square metre for the dolphins cannot compensate for the open expanse of ocean that these dolphins were taken from. As long as tour operators continue to promote this, and other facilities, offering swimming with dolphins as a 'once in a lifetime experience' to their customers, putting an end to captivity is regrettably not going to be instantaneous or straightforward however, with persistence will, we believe, one day be reality.