

# THE AQUARIUM OF GEORGIA - HOME OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST AQUARIUM

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## The impressive entrance to The Aquarium of Georgia.

Regular readers of *The Aquarium Gazette* will recall my article in issue number 16, pages 7 to 12 - The Dubai Aquarium - the world's largest aquarium. Well, now I can tell our readers that it isn't and what a marvellous experience it was to visit the place that boasts this crown.

My visit to Georgia began when a copy of *The Aquarium Gazette* Issue 16 was read by an aquarist friend in the U.S.A. and he emailed to say that the world's largest tank is in the Aquarium of Georgia, Atlanta.

So, off I went to Atlanta....

Motoring down the crowded 14 lane highway towards the skyscrapers of downtown Atlanta is amazing, but not as mind-blowing as the Georgia Aquarium itself.

There are magnificent parks in the centre of the city, one of which is dedicated to Dr John Stith Pemberton (1831-1888) who was a Georgian and invented Coca-Cola. It is called

Pemberton Park and is the home of the Coca-Cola Museum (well worth a visit too). On the upper area of that park is where the Georgia Aquarium was built in 2005- mainly by

the Marcus family. They started the “Home Depot” chain of stores in the U.S.A. and so were able to donate \$250 million to the project. Many more millions have been donated since then by other U.S.A. firms and the aquarium is still developing.



It is said that Bernard (Bernie) Marcus and his wife Billi visited 56 public aquaria in 11 different countries gathering information for the original design. Can't beat that....

A major contributor was Coca-Cola and it was within their Pemberton Park that the Aquarium was built - you can even get a double entry ticket for both attractions. This double ticket is not cheap - \$39-50 adult, \$33-50 senior and \$29-50 child. Note that this does not include the state tax, which adds 8% to everything at all tills. For the Aquarium only: \$25-95 adult and \$19-95 child + that annoying tax.

Entering the Aquarium involves a bag search and several security checks, perhaps because of the sign to our left.

**So don't attempt to take your gun**



**You enter the huge hall via twin aquariums full of perpetually shoaling Jacks (*Carangidae*).**

**The main hall has huge colourful designs of continuously changing lights:-**



It is typical of the very American style of presentation - edutainment: lots of information and displays but all made attractive to the eye. The staff includes 500 full-timers with veterinarians, biologists and technicians, the latter including experts from the entertainment industry. There are more than 2,000 volunteers - people who just want to help.



**For example the traditional Touch Tank has a member permanently in attendance to answer questions (and protect the animals).  
On two levels, this hall leads into six galleries, each sponsored by industry. Just two examples:-**



...and of course, a fast food restaurant and shop:-



All the individual tanks have information about the fish therein, not only captions, there are also flat screen TVs with continuously playing videos - and background music. Those tanks are stunning, with large, colourful specimens in crystal-clear water.

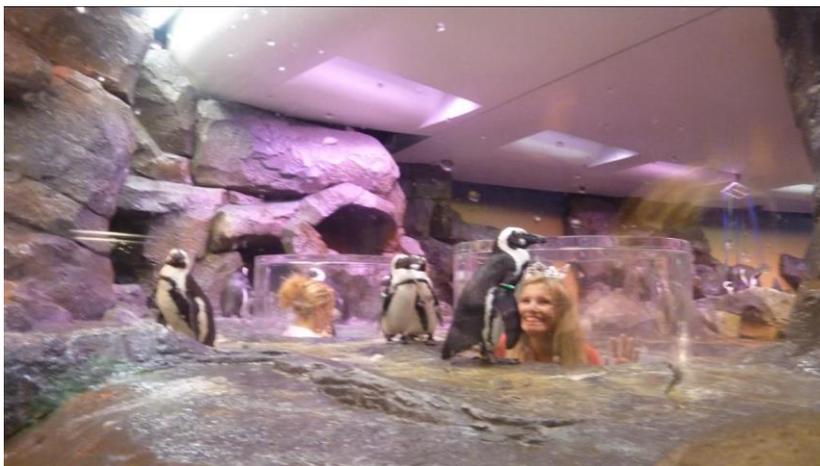


This amazing Discus display held beautiful wild caught and man-made varieties.

You can even dive into some aquaria with loaned scuba equipment (extra cost!)



Some tanks are small but with unusual designs to make them attractive to visitors.....



Penguins close up

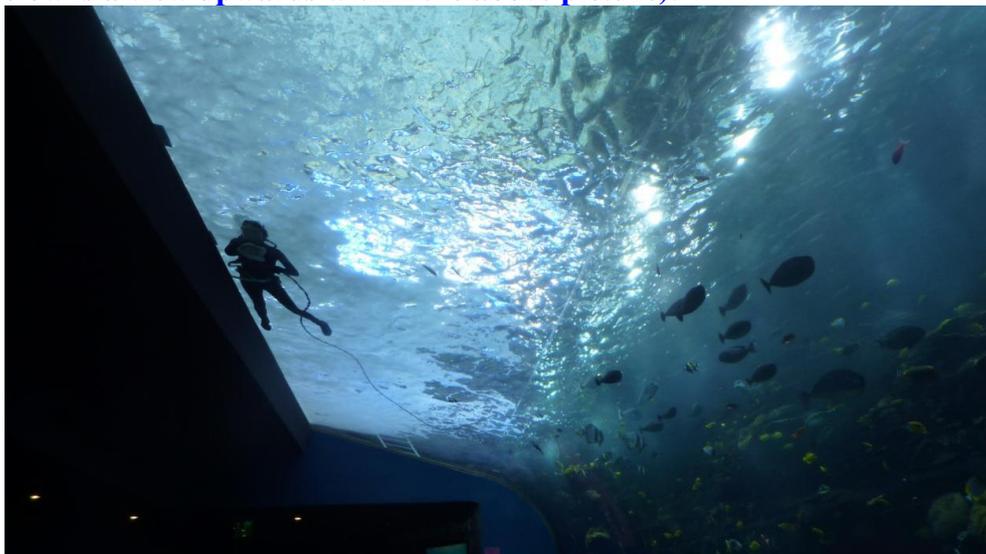
The Aquarium also has a ballroom that can accommodate 6,000 guests, and a cinema with a 3D film (4D actually - water sprays and vibrating chairs included). There are giant tanks with beluga whales and penguin colonies. You can come face to face with the penguins via an acrylic tunnel into their paludarium.

**...and, of course, they have a 30 metre acrylic tunnel with a people mover:-**



So after the wonderful appetizers it was time for the main course! The giant aquarium that they claim is the largest in the world...it is a seawater tank holding 6.3 million US gallons (the Dubai aquarium had 10 million litres)...which is 5.3 million Imperial gallons or almost 24 million litres. More than double that Dubai tank.

**The picture below shows part of the huge acrylic tank in a wrap over style so you can look up at the fishes. By the seating can be seen one of several touch screen monitors with information on the aquarium's contents. Cleaning the tank requires a professional diver (below is a view upwards within the above picture):**





**Another view of the aquarium. It has theatre seating and a member of staff with a microphone describing the fish on view. He is explaining about the Hammer Head and Whale Sharks within.**

## Technical Facts

I visited behind the scenes and discovered a well-equipped laboratory where live coral is grown, seahorses bred, new fish quarantined and research carried out.

In total, the Georgia Aquarium has 10 million (US) gallons which is composed of Atlanta tap water with added Instant Ocean sea salts for the marine tanks. RO is used to remove chloramine from that tapwater and Ozone for sterilisation, but UV is not used at all. Biofiltration is continuous, with backwash pressurized sand filters.



### **The Aqualab.**

### **The Biofiltration unit.**

The Ocean tank has a surf system where 5,000 US gallons are pumped into containers that tilt and overflow every few minutes. This artificial seawater is kept below 25 NO<sub>3</sub>-N whereas the Coralfish tanks are kept less than 15 NO<sub>3</sub>-N. Nitrates are kept down by SDNUs (Sulphur Denitrification Units) – a proprietary ion-exchange system that swops Nitrate ions for Sulphate ions. 5 to 15% water changes are made daily according to continuous electronic analysis results on water chemistry.

Food is mashed wastes donated by the local Atlanta restaurants plus brine shrimp, krill and Silversides from the Aqualab. The mash is pumped into holed tubes lowered down the large aquaria, the fish in smaller units being hand-fed.

The Aquarium is part of the American conservation program called 4R -0 Rehabilitation, Relocation, Rescue and Research for endangered species.

At the beginning of 2011 the Aquarium of Georgia bought the public aquarium Marineland of Florida (for over \$9 million). To celebrate the connection the Georgia Aquarium has a museum of the Florida Aquarium's history with a film and displays of TV and cinema shows such as "Flipper" in 1938, "Tarzan" in 1940, and the "Creature from the Black Lagoon" in 1954. Lloyd Bridges, Mike Nelson, even Elvis Presley have been featured at Marineland and their stories are shown in the Georgia Aquarium museum section.

The Aquarium is an entertainment centre with live Jazz concerts, Summer Camps, Sleepovers, Barmitzahs and corporate meetings. Atlanta, probably most well known in the U.K. for its connection with the brilliant pop band REM, is the 7<sup>th</sup> most visited city in the USA with 35 million tourists recorded in 2010 - most of whom also visited the Aquarium.

If ever you are in the Southern USA for holiday or business and Atlanta can be reached (pre-booked return flights from Orlando cost a few hundred dollars) it is worth the effort and cost to visit the amazing Aquarium of Georgia - and the biggest aquarium in the world.