

## Earth's oceans are the final frontier

Mark Pavilons

The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever.  
Jacques Yves Cousteau

Humans are tied to the ocean and form



er U.S. President John F. Kennedy said when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch, we are going back from whence we came.

He was, of course, referring to life's beginnings in the primordial ooze many eons ago.

I think many of us are drawn to the oceans, lakes and rivers that make up this beautiful blue-green ball flying through space. Maybe it is due to whence we came. Or perhaps it has something to do with the fact our bodies themselves are 60% water.

Our planet, despite its name, is largely water (71% in fact). It should be called Sea, not Earth. But I digress.

Being a bit of science-fiction and astronomy buff, I've long been fascinated by space the final frontier. But what if that final frontier is closer than we think? What if that final frontier, which contains a host of wonders, secrets and mysteries, is right here, beneath our feet?

The vastness of the world's oceans have beckoned since we first gained our sea legs. We quickly learned that Mother Nature, and the oceans themselves, can be quite unforgiving to us mere mortals. That is not our home.

But it is home to countless species of fascinating creatures of all descriptions. It is home to mysterious life forms that we have yet to discover. And perhaps that's what makes it so enchanting and alluring.

Who doesn't love the sound of the waves crashing on a hot, sandy beach? Who can resist jumping into those azure blue waters teeming with life? Who hasn't speculated what lies beneath?

You don't have to venture too far to whet your appetite for our fellow creatures.

My family and I enjoyed our recent trek to Ripley's Aquarium of Canada near the CN Tower.

The aquarium holds 5.7 million litres of water in its exhibits and shows marine and freshwater habitats from around the world. The aquarium is organized into nine galleries: Canadian Waters, Rainbow Reef, Dangerous Lagoon, Discovery Centre, The Gallery, Ray Bay, Planet Jellies, Life Support Systems and the Shoreline Gallery. It is home to some 16,000 animals.

All are interesting in their own way.

The Canadian Waters exhibit features animals from all the bodies of water surrounding Canada. Some animals featured in this exhibit include alewife, largemouth bass, American lobster, wolf eel, lump fish, giant pacific octopus and china rockfish. Who knew?

The Rainbow Reef features animals from the Indo-Pacific regions and there colour abounds. Some of its inhabitants Picasso triggerfish, humbug dascyllus, emperor angelfish, pajama cardinalfish, unicorn surgeonfish. The exhibit also features an interactive dive show.

Our favourite, especially as summer draws to a close, is the shark exhibit. Who doesn't love those deadly predators?

The Dangerous Lagoon is an underwater tunnel with a moving sidewalk, which is the aquarium's largest tank. Some of the featured animals in this thrilling exhibit are sand tiger shark, sandbar shark, rough-tail stingray, green sawfish and green sea turtles. As you walk along the path, the large, menacing sharks simply stroll by. You can see right into their cold eyes. Marvellous and so cool.

In Mother Nature's Art Gallery, you can see some odd creatures like the red lionfish, electric eel, lined seahorse, weedy sea dragon and the archerfish.

Let's not forget Planet Jellies. The exhibit has colour changing displays with five different species of jellyfish - Pacific sea nettle, moon jelly, spotted jelly, and upside-down jelly.

These are perhaps the most fascinating creatures on our planet. They swim, eat and sting, all without eyes, a digestive or nervous system, or even a brain. Jellyfish have roamed the seas between 500 and 700 million years, making them the oldest multi-organ animal.

The Ray Bay exhibit is home to three species of stingrays - bonnethead shark, cownose ray, and the southern stingray.

We don't have many real aquariums around, so this is a must see.

While some people don't like seeing animals in captivity, I believe these sea creatures will live longer, healthier lives here than in the wild.

Ripley's serves to foster education, conservation and research, while providing fun and entertainment for visitors.

By showcasing the beauty and significance of our aquatic world and the animals within it, we will both entertain and inspire while encouraging you to respect and protect the waters of the world.

And that's what we took away. While I've lived long enough to see many things in my life, I was literally in awe of seeing these wonderfully odd creatures up close and personal.

We humans tend to think we are at the top of the food chain, but these gentle beasts have roamed our oceans for a long time. They've adapted.

It's their home. Why not sneak a peak of them in their habitat?