

Exploring the Ocean Explorium



by Amanda
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With winter in full force, I often find myself searching for ways to alleviate my seasonal blues. I get so caught up in the negativity of winter that sometimes I forget it isn't just about plummeting temperatures, icy roads, and long hours of television. Quite the contrary. Winter is about trying new things, perfecting old hobbies, and creating adventures. And what better place to have an adventure than our very downtown?



The Discovery Bay room at the Explorium.

There is something exciting about spending an afternoon uncovering the hidden gems your city has to offer. Just recently I had the pleasure of introducing myself to one such gem. New Bedford's Ocean Explorium, a nonprofit organization established in 2008, is located by the seaport in historic downtown. The facility is housed in an elegant building on the corner of Purchase and Union streets, formerly home to The New Bedford Institution for Savings. The interior has been transformed to accommodate several living aquarium exhibits,

while somehow allowing its original aesthetic beauty to shine through. The marble walls and natural lighting that once made for an inviting financial establishment now quietly compliment a vivid array of marine life.

I stepped inside eagerly anticipating my winter adventure, and was immediately greeted by a friendly pair of volunteers who provided me with informative brochures and promised to field whatever questions I may have had as I wandered about. My exploration had begun.



Making octopi in the Explorer's Zone

I then met Sarah, a volunteer in charge of the Explorer's Zone area. We spoke briefly about the educational programs and activities the Explorium offers to everyone, from children to adults. She explained that the activity themes change regularly; I happened to be visiting the Explorium midway through pollution week. Tables were set up with puzzles, games, arts and craft projects, and other pollution-related experiments encouraging tactile interaction. Little octopuses, made from old toilet tissue rolls, sat next to bird feathers dipped in oil to demonstrate its devastating effects on wildlife.

The Discovery Bay, a warm, soft lit room adjacent to the Explorer's Zone, offers story-telling daily between 12pm and 2pm. As everyone knows, crafting and exciting stories can make even the crankiest child squeal with delight!

The centerpiece of the Explorium is an enormous blue cubical that holds the Science on a Sphere® exhibit. The sphere, created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and given by Umass Dartmouth, is one of only forty-one in the world, and the only one you'll find in New England. Upon entering the darkened interior of the cube, I was greeted by a floating, three-dimensional image of our planet; its like something straight out of Star Wars.



The Science Sphere really must be seen in person; A picture could never do it justice.

Using video projections and computer assistance, real-time scientific data acquired by satellites is cast onto the sphere, which pivots and revolves to show various angles of our planet that would be impossible to see otherwise. The animation is remarkable, the color scheme amazing, and the detailed images are uncanny. Through the sphere, the Explorium is able to present different narrated programs to help educate its guests in animal movement, global weather patterns, and other such natural occurrences.

In addition to their hands-on activities and visual technology, the Explorium has tanks that feature sea horses, jelly fish, and tons of aquatic life native to New England, such as cod fish and scallops. They even offer a community touch tank which allows visitors to examine star fish, crabs, and other various creatures of the sea. However, the most

impressive sea life display is the very vibrant living coral reef. Filled with fluorescent fish and exotic coral, this breathtaking exhibit demonstrates the complete and delicate balance of a functioning ecosystem, while offering a glimpse at the sheer exquisiteness of nature.

Bright colors, friendly faces, and natural beauty make the Ocean Explorium a warm, family friendly way to spend an afternoon. So nip those winter blues in the bud with a fun-filled day indulging in all the aquatic goodness the Explorium has to offer!

Ocean Explorium at the New Bedford Seaport

174 Union Street
New Bedford, MA
(508)994-5400



General Admission:

\$7.50 adults; \$6 children; \$5.50 senior; Free for members and children under 3 years of age.