



# In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends

Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 Day 16



So, the Texas State Aquarium? Well worth the price. This has to be in the top five of places to visit so far on this trip. This is a very big facility divided into five themed areas. I walked through the Gulf of Mexico once, visited the Boardwalk Gardens three times, Dolphin Bay twice and had to be dragged away from the Caribbean Journey. It was five hours well spent. I even took part in touching and feeding sting rays and touching a shark. With all the fun things to show you, let's get to it by starting with the Gulf of Mexico.

GULF OF MEXICO



I didn't touch these sting rays. If I would have tried, I probably would have been kicked out of the aquarium. Not to mention I would've had to jump in the tank.





A small coral reef example

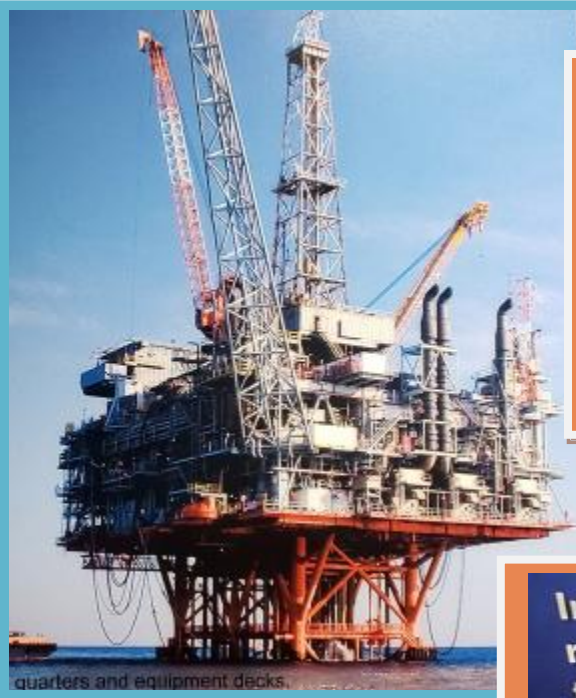
## Invaders

They are kind of ugly, and kind of beautiful at the same time.

Lionfish are native to the Indo-Pacific, so they are "invasive" anywhere else. Hundreds are now found throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

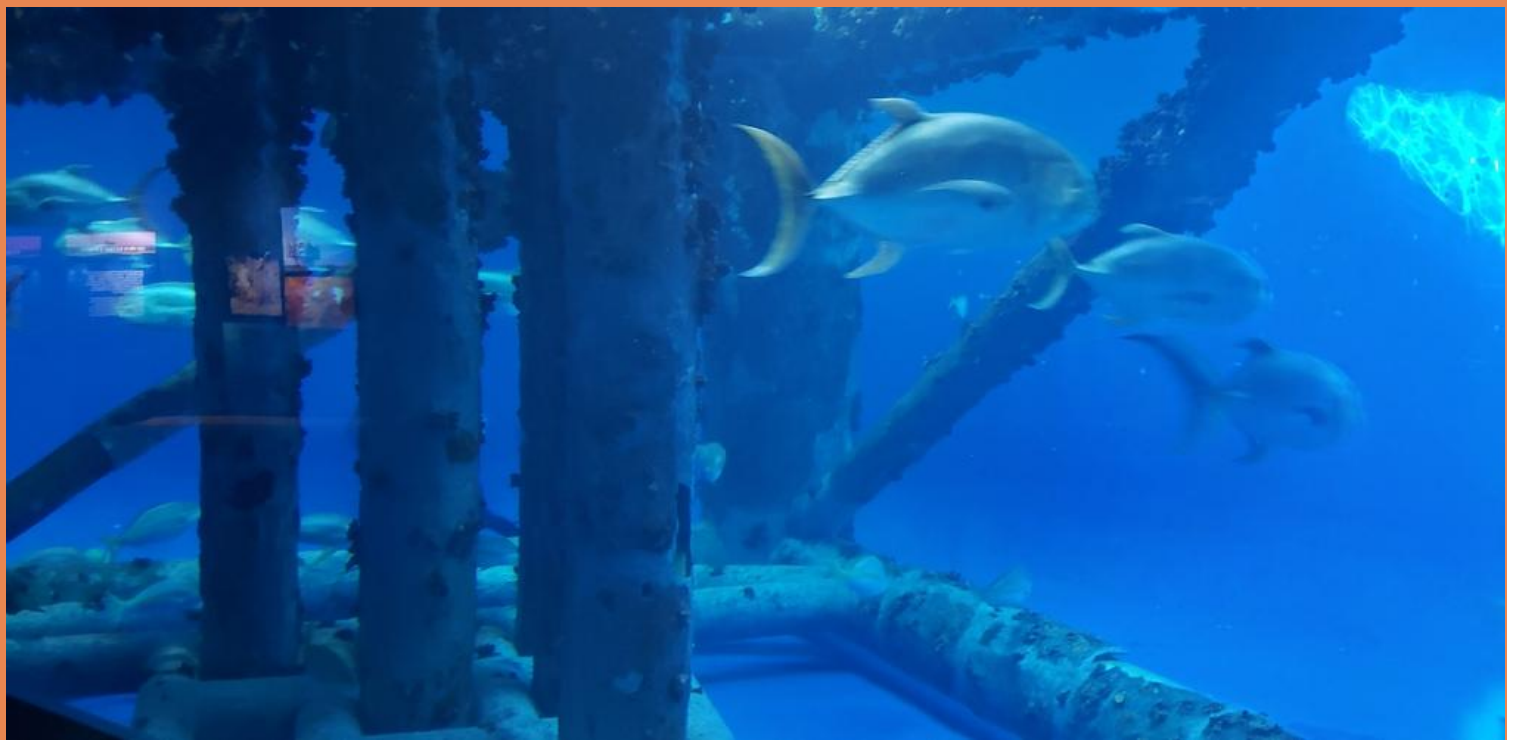






Naturally occurring reefs and rocky areas are rare in the Gulf of Mexico. Instead, sea life dependent upon hard surfaces settle on oil and gas platforms. Small fishes, attracted by food, find shelter amid the "legs." Smaller fish attract larger predators, such as migratory fishes, which use the structures as feeding stations. Commercial and sport fishermen and SCUBA divers also use these man-made reefs.

In the past, rigs and platforms were dismantled and removed at the end of their production lives causing the destruction of established reef communities. Today, the petroleum industry offers the structures to coastal states that place them in select locations in the Gulf of Mexico. The habitats may last as long as one hundred years before they are destroyed by corrosion.



This is a great example of the underwater habitat formed around a decommissioned oil platform. This is the largest *indoor* tank here at the aquarium, as you can tell by the divers doing some housekeeping, 125,000 gallons.





## *Artificial Reefs*

Production platforms, like natural reefs, help to increase the numbers and distribution of marine life in the Gulf. A typical platform provides about 4,000 square meters of surface area on which plants and animals can grow.

## *First Settlers*

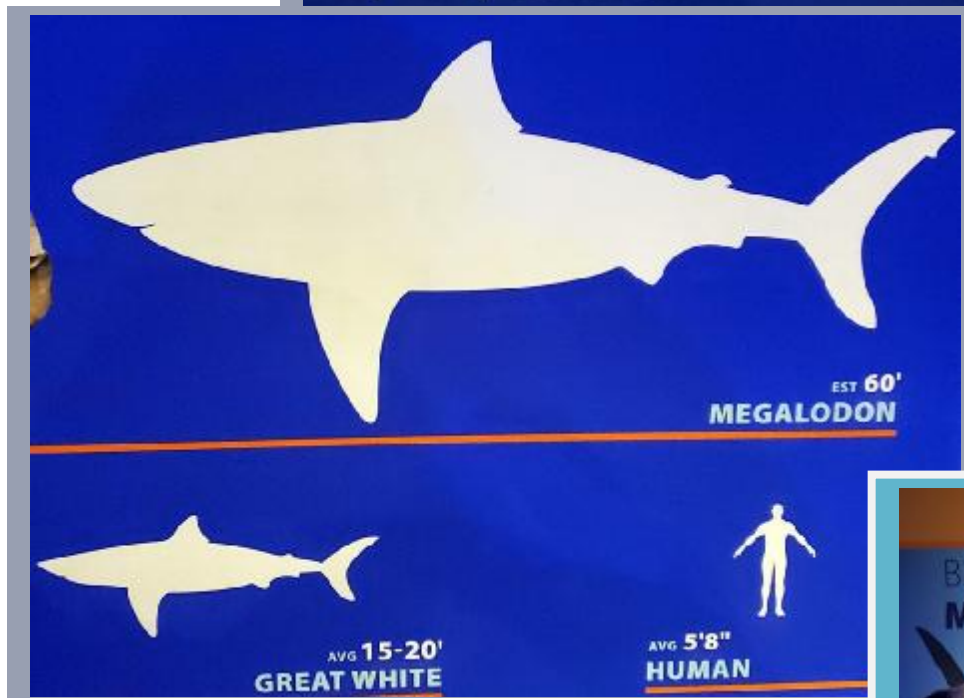
The living carpet of plants and animals that first covers the platform legs provides food and shelter for small animals like sea urchins, blennies, crabs, and snails. These, in turn, attract larger animals such as sharks, barracuda, groupers, and jackfish.

**MEGALODON (EXTINCT) AND GREAT  
WHITE SHARK (MODERN) COMPARISON**



**Megalodon** (meaning 'big tooth') is an extinct species of shark that lived approximately 28 to 1.5 million years ago. It is regarded as one of the largest and most powerful predators in ocean history. Megalodon may have reached a length of 60 feet, and looked like a stockier and larger version of today's great white shark.

**The great white shark** is very wide-ranging through most oceans of the world. They roam from very shallow water near shore across ocean depths. Today they are rare and vulnerable as a species, and are listed as endangered by many countries.



How would you like to be a surfer and have to worry about one of these swallowing you whole? It was at this point where I rolled up my sleeve and pet a couple sharks.

Below – I had no idea sharks had followed the Mississippi as far as Illinois. Makes sense that a shark would be attracted to Illinois though, doesn't it? Especially a "Bull" shark.



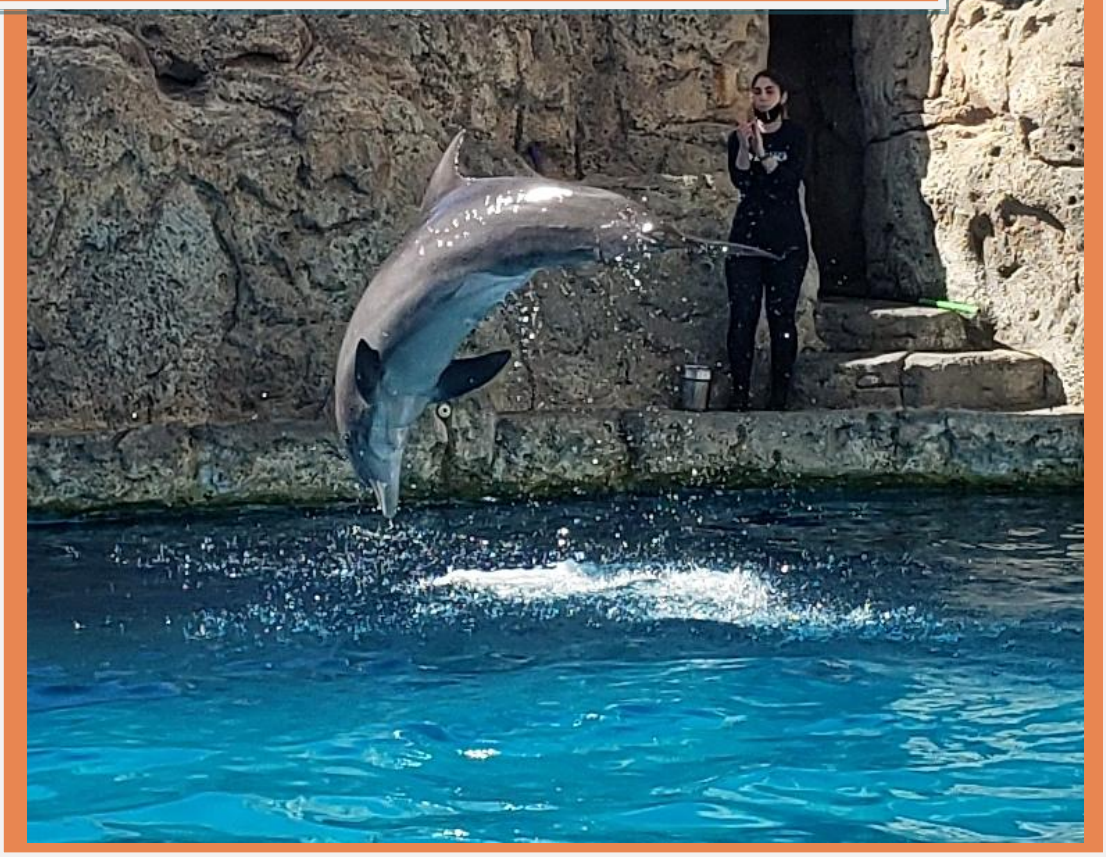
## Bull Shark

Can survive in fresh water and has been spotted 1,800 miles up the Mississippi River in Illinois.





I hope you don't feel I got carried away with the action shots. They happened so fast I couldn't really see them on the camera at the time, not until they were downloaded to the computer. Then they turned out so well I didn't want to get rid of any. I hope you enjoy them.





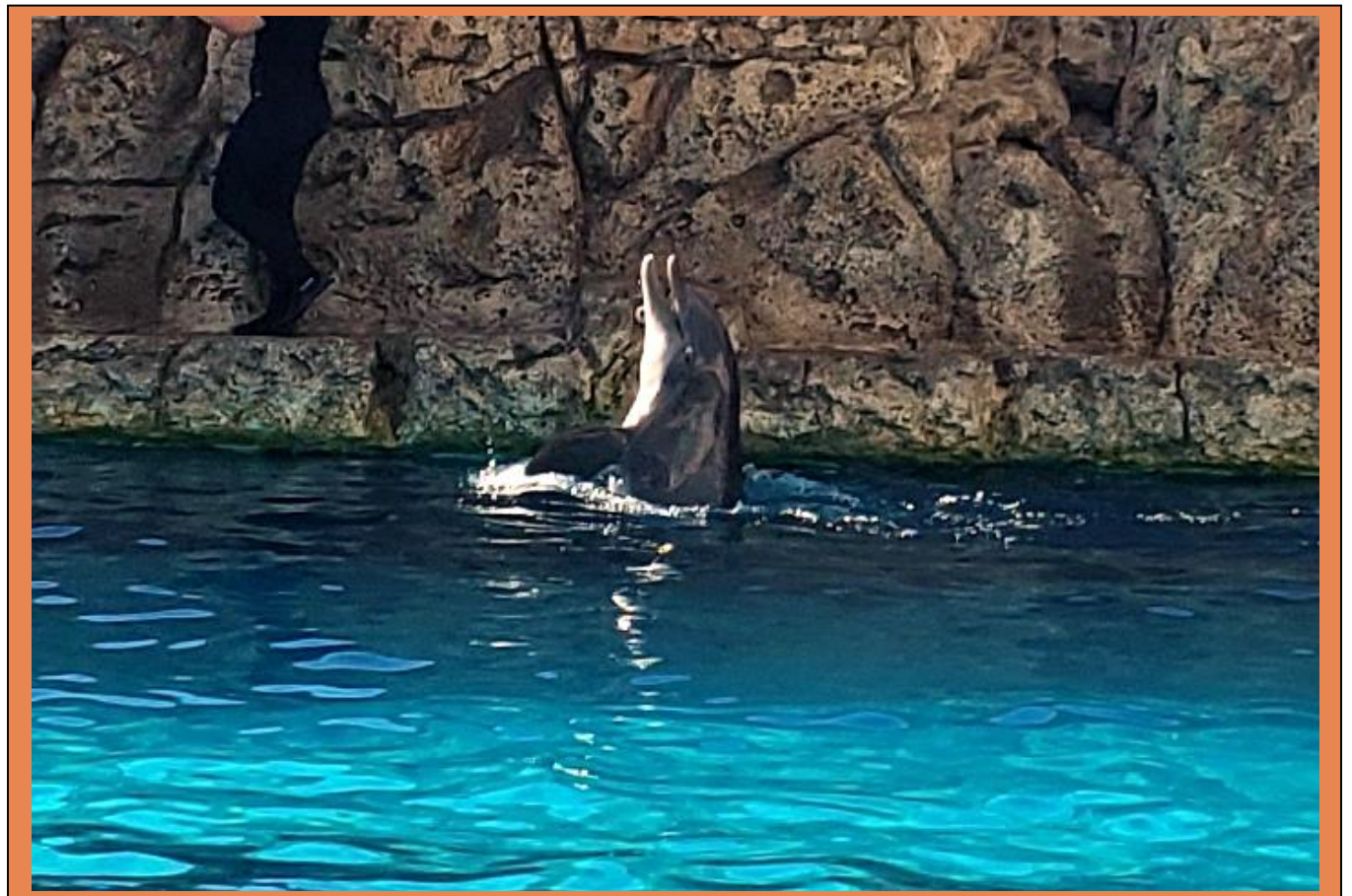


















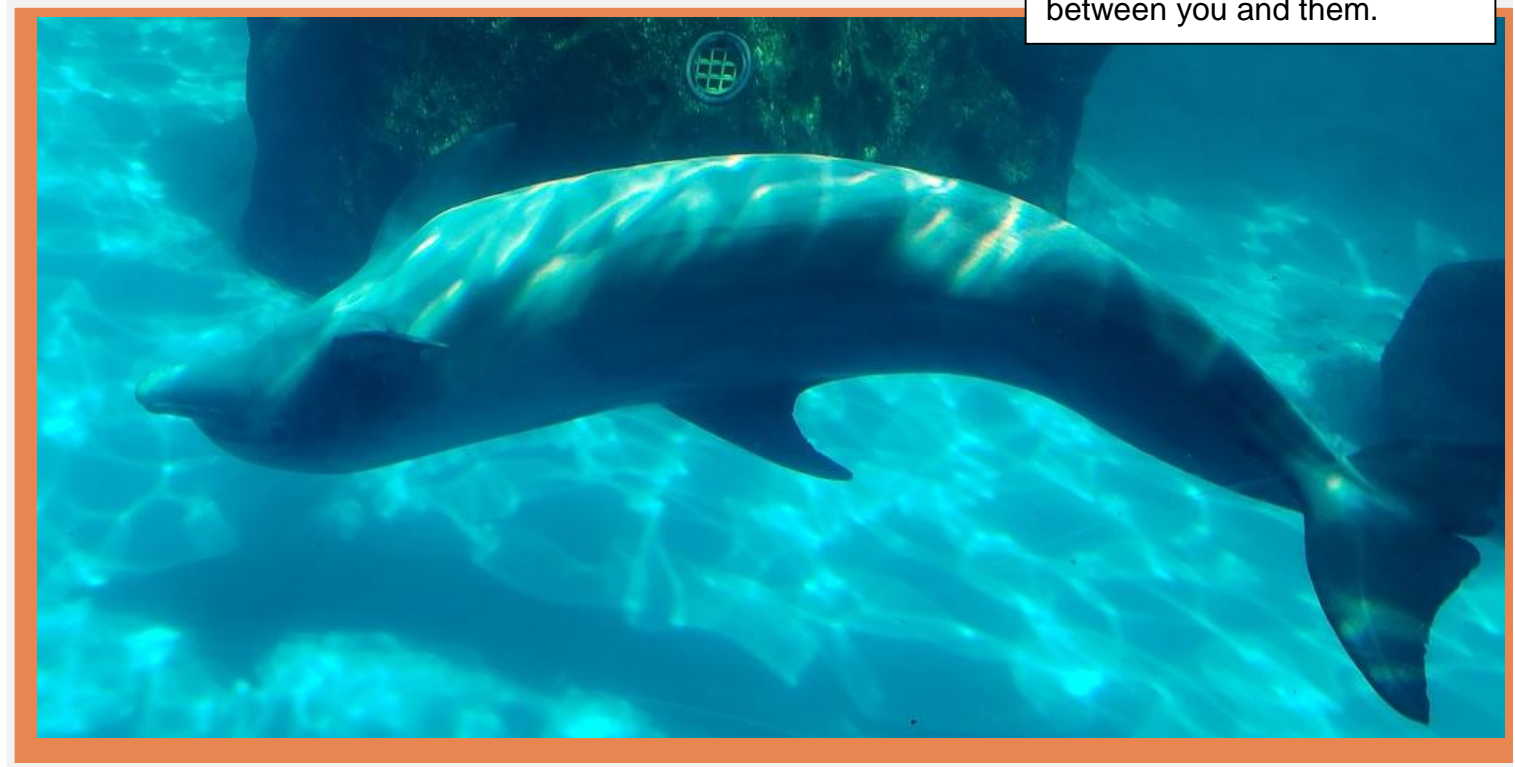
Photo op for this little girl when she volunteered.







As the show ended I took a look at my map for where I wanted to go next and I noticed there was an area by the dolphins marked “underwater viewing”. This sounded interesting, so I made my way down the ramp. Low and behold, what a great viewing platform. There is a seventy foot curved acrylic window with seating where you can see a good portion of the tank. Then there’s an upside-down U shaped bump-out, entirely of acrylic, eight feet high. And the dolphins like to swim right past it. There is no zoom used here, there is only the plastic between you and them.







Next was Tortuga Chat at the sea turtle tank.



I forgot the name of this female, but if you notice she only has one full flipper. She was tangled in some fishing line and lost part of two flippers and all of a third. She has been here at the aquarium since it opened 32 years ago.





Once again, up close and personal, no zoom.



## OTTER CREEK







At this point I took a walk over to Splash Park, but only to buy some lunch and eat at a table in the sun. A little on the cool side today.

# Caribbean Journey

## Cenote

### From the Ground Up

I noticed the Caribbean Journey takes up two floors and I decided to start on the upper level.



*Cenotes* are underground sinkholes that vary in range and size. While cenotes can look like rivers or small lakes, they are formed by an entirely different process.

Cenotes are formed by rain that seeps through the cracks in the limestone landscape, which slowly dissolves the rocks from underneath.



This panoramic turned out pretty nice





No use of the zoom here either. I am literally three to four feet away with nothing in-between. I could just step over the low barrier wall, and join those flamingoes, but my knees bend the wrong way.

## Blue Hole Overlook

## Marine Caverns

A blue hole is a large marine sinkhole that is open to the surface of the water. The cavern extends below sea level, and many blue holes provide access to submerged cave systems.

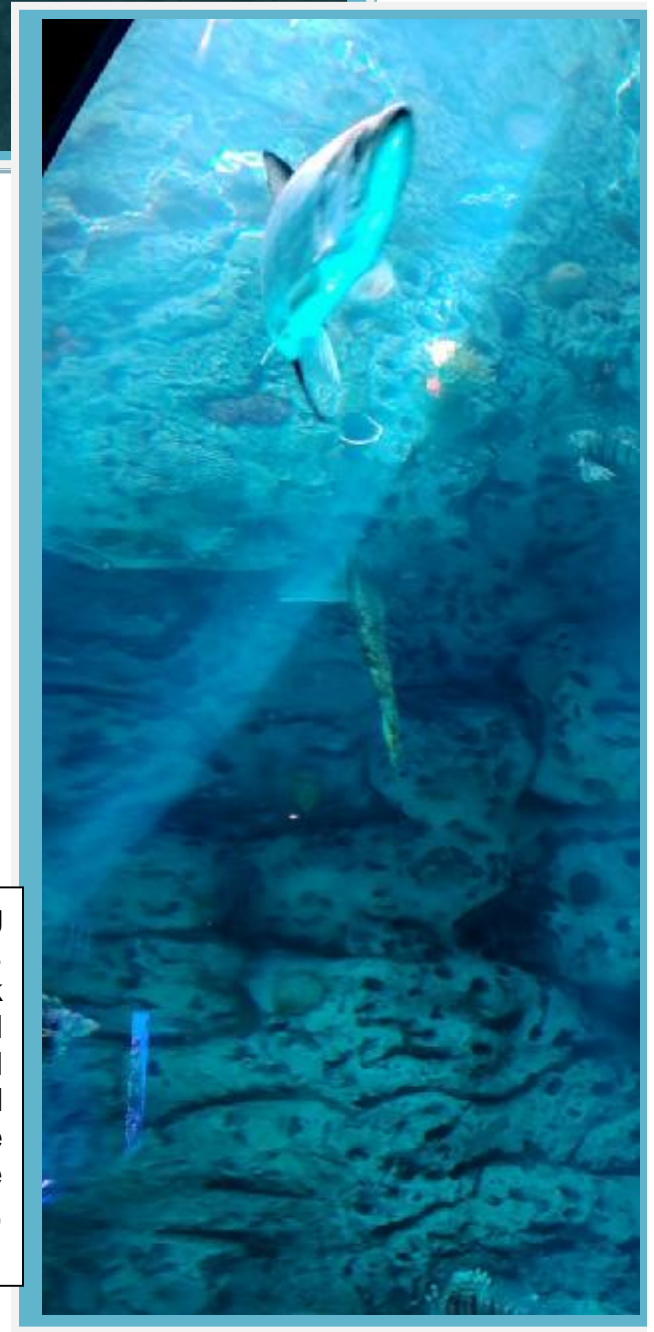
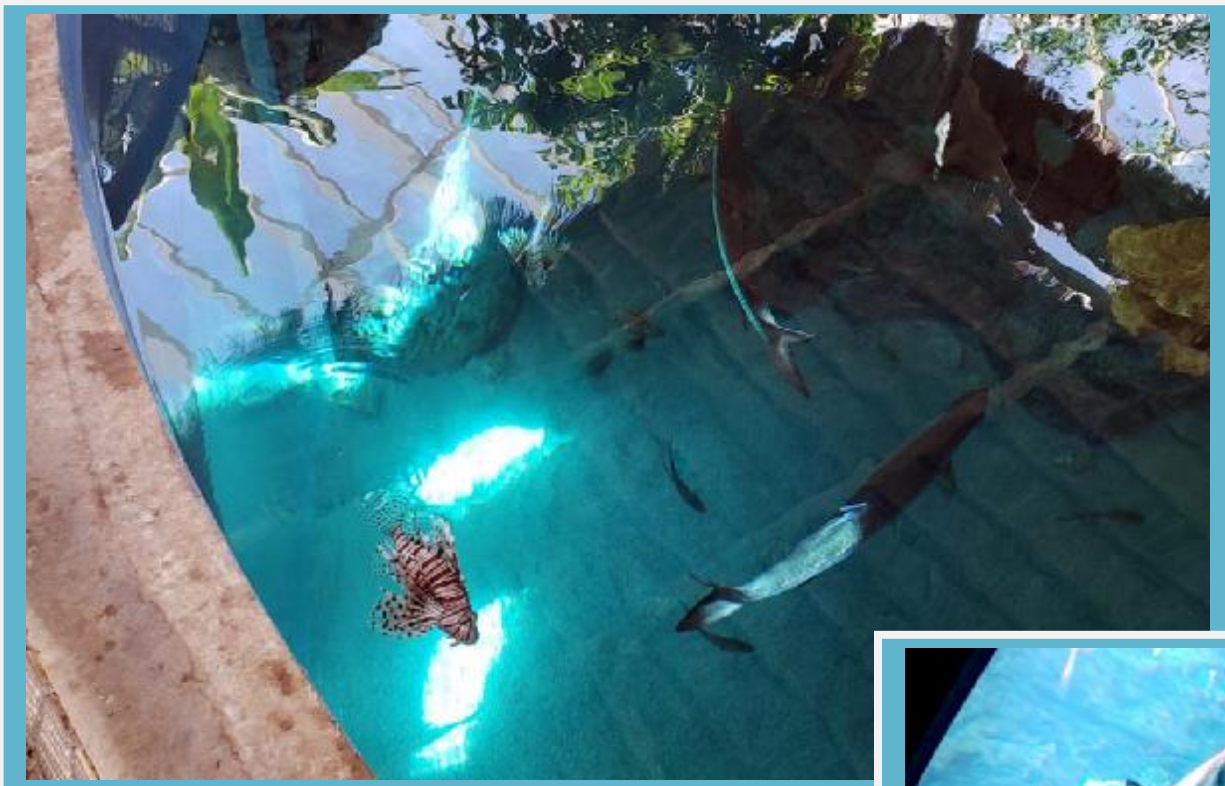
Blue holes usually contain a mix of fresh, salt, or brackish waters.

Southern screame



Aerial view of a blue hole in Belize.





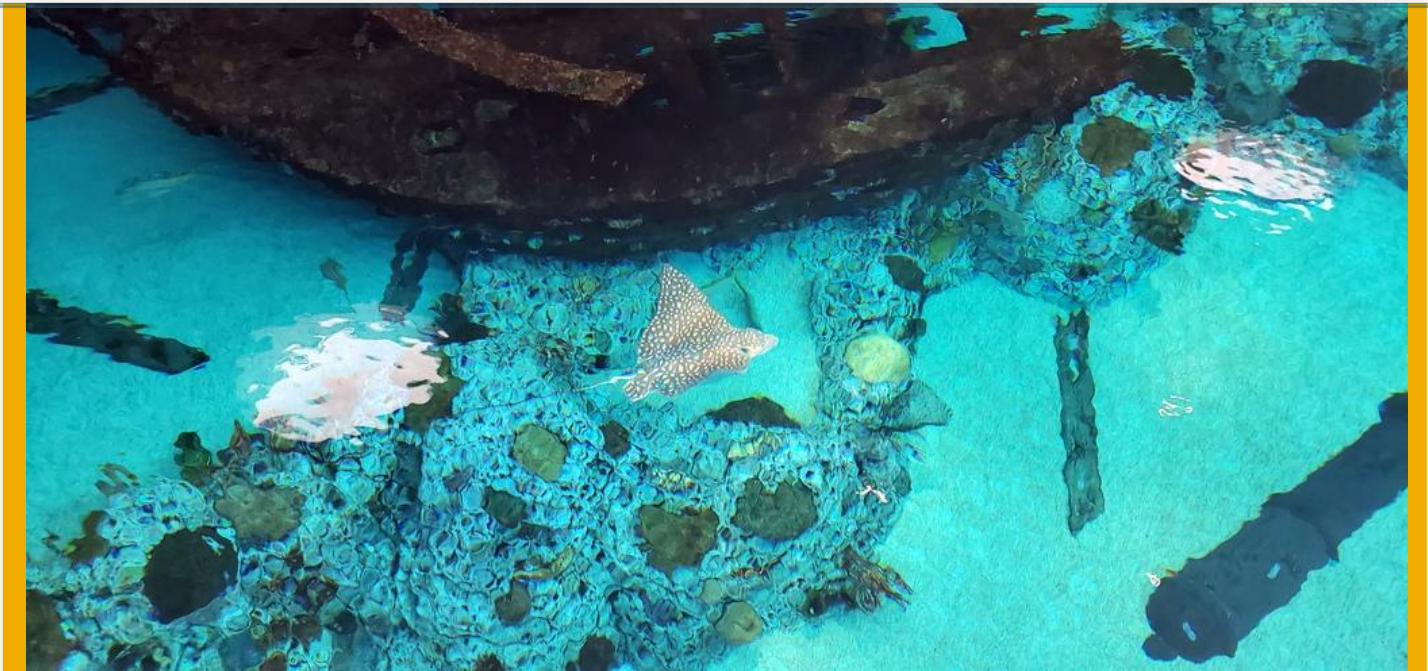
Whatever he is, he's about fifteen inches tall

Ok, it gets a little confusing here. After the photo looking down into the Blue Hole above, I snapped the birdie portrait. At this point I was done on the second level. If you look again at today's first photo you will notice the flat-topped glass pyramid roof, that is the climate controlled upper level of the Caribbean Journey. I took an escalator down and discovered that a couple of the tanks showing the above water setting, were continued on the lower level in the underwater setting, like the one to the right of the Blue Hole, with the sun ray piercing the water (cool shot).





So the sign to the left and the two photos on this page were taken from the upper level. I thought this tank was soooo cool. A shipwreck, cannons lying half buried in the sand, sharks, coral, fish, sting rays, and HUGE! I was fascinated and stood there for a good ten minutes taking it all in. Then I went downstairs and saw it from underwater. I was mesmerized.







Unfortunately, the photos do not do justice to the actual colors and there's nothing to be done about the reflection of the lights and the displays behind me. My daughters know how I feel about The Streets of Old Milwaukee at the Public Museum here in Milwaukee, how I could spend hours taking in every little detail and never tire of it, no matter how many times I see it. This feels the same way. It is, literally, like sitting on the bottom of the Caribbean Sea and watching the ebb and flow of life under the water. I think so anyways, I have never really been snorkeling or scuba diving so it's just my opinion. That's one of those bucket list items I hope to accomplish.

Below – I didn't realize it at first, but there is a walkway, or underwater tunnel, along the backside of the tank. You can see the curve of the acrylic and the shark swimming above you.







This could be a frightening sight if you happen to be swimming down here and a shark passes by overhead.



I tore myself away from the Caribbean Sea to go for a stroll along the Boardwalk Gardens. Here I found one turtle. Or is there more than one? Can you find the other three? The little guy below was about four and a half feet long.





# GRACE

bald eagle

Arrived in 2007

Weight: 11 lb

Grace came from the Bird Treatment and Learning Center in Anchorage, Alaska. She survived a left wing injury but is unable to fly or hunt on her own.



Poor lady. You can see the damaged wing.

This was new information to me. I had never heard this before.

Look how large the eye space is! The eyes are so big they weigh more than the brain.





Left - A sea turtle sculpture.

Below right – I went back to the next dolphin show to try and get photos from the lower level this time. This is the only one of any significance.

Bottom – I had time before feeding the rays to spend some more time under the Caribbean Sea. This time I caught divers, probably the same two from the oil rig, cleaning this tank.





Even under the sea, you still have to wash the windows.

I love the one below. Colorful coral, two different schools of fish, a shark, a ray (upper left) and some medium sized fish. I now understand the fascination some people have with tropical fish tanks. I could easily have my living quarters next to a view like this. Of course nobody has a 400,000 gallon fish tank, complete with ship wreck, in their home.



I didn't even think about getting a photo when I was petting the shark, but I made sure to get one here. I must have touched about ten or fifteen of them. Then the keeper came along, passed out smelt, and showed us how to feed the rays. It feels really weird. No teeth. They kind of clamp down on it.

That was it for the Texas State Aquarium. I sure am glad I decided to visit, it was a lot of fun. I could watch the Caribbean Sea tank all day long.



Since it was only a little after three, I figured I had time to visit the Botanical Gardens.

After I parked I met the young man parked next to me, Court Sullivan. Court is traveling from L.A. back to his home in Atlanta and taking his time doing it. Since he is living out of his car



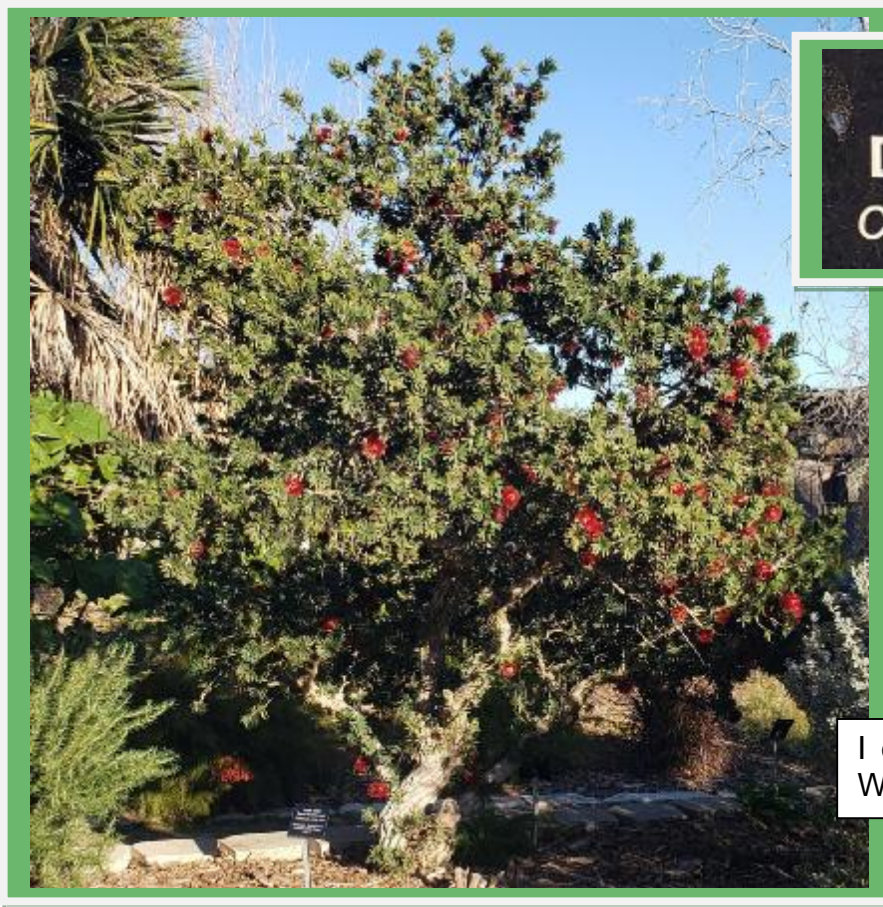
while on the road, he was admiring the RV. We talked for awhile about boondocking, sights to see, Joshua Tree National Park, Carlsbad Caverns and life on the road in general. Court owns a comedy website, so he can work from anywhere. He also runs an adult soccer league back in Atlanta, but that's on hiatus due to Covid. We exchanged web addresses and I will add a link on the links page. When I added that line on the bottom of all my webpages, "Maybe I'll see you on the road", I never thought it might actually happen. Be safe Court.



Yes, I know, it's the wrong time of year for visiting any kind of garden facility. The flowers above were about the only ones in bloom. The Butterfly house had two butterflies. The orchid house had very few blooms and none of the animals were on display. But hey, what can you expect?







**Little John  
Dwarf Bottlebrush**  
*Callistemon x 'Little John'*

I did like this tree, but it can't grow in Wisconsin.

This one is for Erin



## BEARDED DRAGON

Tomorrow I hit the Science and History Museum and then I think I am done with Corpus Christi.

Weather is good. Warm sunny days in the 60's and 70's and cool nights. Sorry Wisconsin, for passing along that information.

Not much else to say, except that today was a good day. I had fun and enjoyed myself, and that's the point of my trips. Fun, adventure and new discoveries.

Until next time.....