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## **A Close Encounter with Wild Dolphins**

**By Gustasp Irani**

### **A Close Encounter with Wild Dolphins by Gustasp Irani**

My first glimpse of Tangalooma's famous wild dolphins was from the boat that ferried us to Moreton Island 75 minutes from Brisbane, Australia. They arched their black silken bodies out of the water as though to greet us as we docked at the island's main pier. I was down at the pier later that night for an up close and personal meeting with these friendly sea mammals; a group of eight that frolicked in the floodlit waters as they waited for the party to start.

Along with the other guests of the Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort, the only one on the island, I trooped down to the beach, picked up a fish in each hand from a bucket and stepped into the water. Immediately a dolphin swam up to me. Large, gentle eyes looked into mine; pleading to be fed. I bent over and held the fish in the water and the dolphin gratefully accepted my offering in its smiling mouth. And then lingered on a while, I like to believe to say thank you, before swimming out and repeating the ritual with the next guest who stepped up to feed it.

The wild dolphins that visited this little outcrop every day of the year to bum a snack and say hello to us, their distant cousins that lived on the land, was only a fraction of the thrills that Tangalooma had to offer its guests. Over two days in this island paradise, I would snorkel with schools of colourful fish, scuba diving within shipwrecks, ride All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) across sandy banks and even go tobogganing down desert dunes.

Indeed, still recall the moment I lay flat on my stomach on a plank at the summit of a sand dune and looked down the treacherous plunge ahead of me. The moment of panic, however, had passed. I had already committed to the tobogganing run and focused my attention on doing it right. I grasped the front of the plank and lifted it off the sand and made sure that my elbows and feet were well up in the air so that they did not get scraped as I raced down the dune.

'Let it rip?' Alcester, our Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort tour manager and guide queried. 'Let it rip!' I responded. The next moment I was tearing down the face of the dune. I don't know what speeds I reached, but it seemed like over 100 kmp and with the ground whizzing under me, no more than a foot from my face, it was both terrifying and exhilarating. When eventually I came to a complete stop at the bottom of the dune I stayed still on the plank, savouring the thrill of the ride. A little later I was trudging up the dune for one more zany run down its slope. It was the culminating highlight of the island safari

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which started with a drive through dense native forests that emerged onto a bleak desert in the middle of the outcrop.

Back at the resort I checked in at the resort's dive unit and kitted up - tanks, wetsuit, the works - for an underwater adventure. A little boat ferried us to the dive site at the far end of the island where the rusted superstructure of sunken vessels spoked the sky above the water. Soon I was swimming with fellow divers around battered hulls of ships resting upon the seabed and admiring the new marine ecosystem of colourful coral and tropical fish that had evolved around these ghostly galleons. I felt my pulse start to quicken when Lea, our dive leader and my diving buddy, led us into heart of one of these wrecks. Sensing my apprehension, she held my hand while we swam through an underwater passageway. I emerged from the ordeal with the sense of elation that comes from having confronted my worst fears and survived.

The rest of the dive was a visual delight. Soft coral swayed to the rhythm of the currents while brilliantly hued fish in amazing shapes and sizes waltzed around us in this bizarre underwater wonderland where life flourished in the midst of ancient wrecks.

That evening I slowed down the pace of the adventure and lazed around in the shallow of one of the many swimming pools that dot the property. I lay in the water and congratulated myself for following up on the lead I found on Traveljini.com. I was browsing through the site looking for something in India - Traveljini.com is the leading travel portal in the country - when I noticed that it was offering a close encounter with wild dolphins package in Australia. Before I knew it I was hooked; curiosity turned to desire and desire to compulsion. I had to get to Tangalooma. Now that I was here, it was all Traveljini.com promised it would be and more.

Later that evening I was down by the floodlit pier to interact with the Tangalooma bottlenose dolphins once more. The ranger attached to the Dolphin Research Centre assured us that the feeding ceremony accounted for only around 20% of the dolphins' diet and that they had to depend on their own hunting instincts to catch fish in the open seas. According to her the contact between dolphin and humans on this island goes back a long way to the time when the two cooperated to catch fish. The dolphins would herd schools of fish towards the shore where the aborigine would catch them in their nets. Once the catch was hauled in, the local fishermen would throw back a part of it into the water for the dolphins to feed on.

The next morning I shifted back into high gear when I mounted an all terrain vehicles (ATV), a modified four-wheel motorcycle with a souped up engine, and went speeding down a deserted beach before heading for a dusty rollercoaster ride over sand dunes that waved over the island. It was a fitting finale to an adventure that lifted me to zany heights and gifted me with peaceful and quiet moments; an adventure during which I had the good fortune to be part, if only briefly, of the legendary bonding between humans and dolphins.

Gustasp Irani

Travel Writer for the past 25 years. Currently working for Traveljini.com

**Are whales and dolphins, marine mammals or fishes?**

## A Close Encounter with Wild Dolphins

**By Sylvie Leochko**

As a teacher myself who used to teach Science to junior school students for years, I have seen a lot of confusion about whales and dolphins and even some frustration concerning their classification.

What is the fuss all about? The frustration is basically coming into play when confused people talk about both dolphins and whales as being fishes so when they are being corrected about it, they tend to hate it. According to them, what lives in the water must be a fish otherwise it wouldn't be there. Isn't that right? Wrong!

The fact and the matter is that fishes like the great white shark and marine mammals such as dolphins and whales are not under the same classification simply because of the way nature created their body, the way it functions and differentiated their needs as well.

You see, fishes have gills and take their oxygen directly from the water while marine mammals must go to the surface approximately every 30 minutes to inhale oxygen from directly from the air and get rid of the Carbon Dioxide using their blowhole otherwise they would drown. This process takes only a few seconds but is necessary for their survival. This is why when a calf is born; the mother will push it to the surface to allow it to take its first breath of air.

Another difference is the fact that dolphins and whales have a skeleton made of bones contrary to fishes which have theirs made of cartilage. Also, most fishes give birth to their babies by laying eggs then having the male fertilize them. Later on, the babies are on their own.

The exception to the rule of laying eggs is the shark. You see, sharks like the great white shark are actually giving birth to several live pups but as soon as they are born, they must fend for themselves. Marine mammals such as whales and dolphins giving birth to usually one calf, nourish them with maternal milk, raise them to maturity and teach them all they know to help them learn how to eventually fend for themselves.

When dolphins and whales are born, they have a thin layer of hair covering their body. Fishes will be covered with either scales or a rubbery type of skin such like the one found on the great white shark.

As you can see, there is no way that dolphins and whales are fishes like the great white shark. There are important differences.

My name is Sylvie Leochko. If you wish to learn more about dolphins, whales or the great white shark, I invite you to visit the following websites:

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and



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