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**POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM WINS NOMINATION AS ONE OF THE 10 BEST AQUARIUMS
IN NORTH AMERICA BY USA TODAY 10BEST, AND VOTING IS ON NOW THROUGH AUG. 18**

Vote here: <http://www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-aquariums/>

TACOMA, Wash. – Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, home to a diving experience with 17 large sharks, plus smaller sharks and stingrays visitors can touch, is among 20 nominees for the Best Aquarium in North America.



Point Defiance fans can vote for Tacoma's very own jewel at <http://www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-aquariums/> by clicking on the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium photo.

Voting began Monday to winnow the list down to the Top 10 and come up with the Best Aquarium in North America.

The competition is stiff. It includes some of the most well-known names North America – and in some of the most populous areas, including Seattle, Vancouver, B.C., Chicago, San Francisco, Georgia, Monterey and Long Beach, Calif.

The USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice competition staff used information provided by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums to select the 20 nominees. They weighed a number of factors, including annual visitor count, affordability of entrance fees, awards won and commitment to conservation efforts, according to the 10best.com travel destination website.

How could they not include Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on the list? The 240,000-gallon South Pacific Aquarium ecosystem is home to 17 large sharks, including a 9-foot-long, 450-pound lemon shark, and the very popular Eye-to-Eye Shark Dives, which began last October.

Eye-to-Eye allows visitors to immerse themselves in an underwater cage to view sharks up close – or to dive more deeply into the shark’s world with scuba equipment.

No prior experience is needed for the Eye-to-Eye Cage Dive in which participants breathe surface-supplied air. It’s open to ages 8 and up. Those who choose the Eye-to-Eye Scuba Dive must be certified scuba divers at least 15 years old. Both dives provide unparalleled fun.

But there’s a message, too. Divers learn about sharks’ imperiled status in the world’s oceans, where they are slaughtered for their fins and killed through overfishing. It’s part of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium’s deep commitment to education and conservation of the world’s resources.

For more information on the dives, go to www.pdza.org/dive/. For more about shark conservation, go to www.pdza.org/savesharks.

The South Pacific Aquarium also is home to Stingray Cove, where visitors can not only get close to stingrays and small sharks – they can *touch* them. The animals aren’t harmful to humans; the stingrays’ barbs are clipped and the whitespotted bamboo and epaulette sharks aren’t naturally aggressive.

Also this summer, the South Pacific Aquarium and North Pacific Aquarium are home to SHARKMANIA!, a multi-level, multi-sensory experience that includes the Buzz Saw Sharks of Long Ago. It’s an art and scientific artifact presentation of behemoth prehistoric sharks – with circular-saw-like teeth – that roamed the seas 270 million years ago.

So, get in the swim of things, buzz on over to <http://www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-aquariums/> and vote for Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Each person can cast a vote once a day, so there’s lots of ballot stuffing Tacoma and Puget Sound residents can do between now and Aug. 18.

We might say there’s nothing fishy about it, but that would be wrong. There’s a lot fishy about us, and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is simply the best.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).