



Hug the Dolphins

Watching dolphins jumping through hoops through binoculars is just too far away when Dolphin Encounter enables you to hug them.

Dolphin Encounter is an educational programme at Ocean Park, in which participants are allowed to feed and touch the dolphins in a waist-level pool.

“The dolphins will stop in front of people, float on their tummies and even sing,” said Elaine Lee Yin-chen, who has been a dolphin trainer in Ocean Park for three years.

“It was probably the most memorable part of my Hong Kong visit,” said Jay Rao Si, a visitor from Jiangxi province. He participated in the programme with his girlfriend last December.

Mr Rao said that there were two five-year-olds sharing the encounter with them.

“There were absolutely no barriers between us and the dolphins,” said Mr

Rao. “The dolphins are fun-loving, playful and simply brilliant.”

Mr Rao said the trainers were well-prepared. “They had briefed us thoroughly before we entered the pool,” he said.

Precautions are taken in order to ensure the safety of the participants. They are told not to touch the head and tail of dolphins so as not to irritate them.

“We were sterilised,” said Crystal Siu Wing-man, 26, another participant who went with a friend, “and we had to put on a pair of special waterproof trousers.”

“My most memorable part was feeding the animals and really getting to touch them,” said Miss Siu.

Before the encounter, they were required to attend a seminar on basic biological and environmental knowledge.

Miss Siu said that the time for playing with dolphins was too short, as much time was spent on the one-hour talk, throughout the 90-minute programme.

“Since this is the only way to literally touch dolphins in Hong Kong, we have to go to this one,” said Miss Siu. She also said she would consider going there again if new features were added and prices were cheaper.

The programme costs HK\$680 per person, and half of the fee goes to the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation of Hong Kong, which aims to advocate the conservation of Asian wildlife and its habitats.

“Many regard this activity as an once-in-a-lifetime experience,” said Jane Ng, spokeswoman of Ocean Park’s Education Department. She said that they want to deliver messages of environmental protection during the programme.

Dolphin Encounter allows a maximum of six participants for each session. For more details, visit Ocean Park’s website at <http://www.oceanpark.com.hk/eng/main/index.asp>.

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