

TRAVEL

Virginia's gone green and wild: Aquarium's 'Restless Planet' exhibit new home for exotic, rare creatures of the land and sea

By Elissa Simmons
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Last fall marked the opening of "Restless Planet" for the Virginia Aquarium and Science Center located in Virginia Beach. The \$25 million renovation features four habitats.

The habitats depict what was likely Virginia's ecological history millions of years ago.

The new exhibit showcases 6,000 animals and 367 species and 300 hands-on, educational fun.

Indonesia's Flores Island Habitat

The Indonesian Volcanic Island Habitat is home to the Komodo dragon, the world's largest lizard. There are two males and one female.

They seem very much at home in their new surrounding and at times act as if they have been coached to pose for photos. Could it be they are just as curious about us? Fluttering in the same area are colorful Indonesian finches.

The unique aspect of this section is the capability for young visitors to crawl into and pop up in a clear acrylic bubble and get a eye-to-eye, close up view. How cool is that?

Red Sea Habitat

The Red Sea Habitat consists of an 8,000 gallon aquarium with beautiful live coral. Eagle Rays with the wing span of up to 6 feet swim in a 100,000 gallon aquarium along with a remarkable collection of fish. A 40-foot glass tunnel allows guests to have a spectacular underwater experience.

Coastal Sahara Desert Habitat

The Coastal Desert and Mediterranean Sea area brings desert



Left, the rare and endangered Tomistoma crocodile is in the The Malaysian Peat Swamp Habitat of the Virginia Aquarium's Restless Planet exhibit. Right, Croc's 19th Street Bistro's owner Laura Wood Habr is known as the "Green Queen." The restaurant is a sponsor of the Restless Planet exhibit.



PHOTOS BY ELISSA SIMMONS



and sea together. Some of the creatures featured here are short-snouted seahorses, cuttle fish, hedgehogs, and deadly scorpions and cobras.

Malaysian Peat Swamp Habitat

The Malaysian Peat Swamp Habitat is damp with thunder and watery sounds. Here you'll find southeast Asian animals that include snakehead fish, turtles and Malaysian leaf frogs.

The most impressive in this section is the rare and endangered Tomistoma crocodile.

Its very long and narrow snout sets them apart from other crocs. The pair, one female and one male, were born in 1985. Now, somewhere between 11 feet and 13 feet long, they

are at the age to reproduce.

It took the aquarium six years to acquire them. They wanted to make sure they were compatible, so when the female laid her head over the male's tail they knew they had a match.

In addition, be sure to visit Restless Planet's two Science Shacks. Play "Puzzled Earth" and "Where in the World" games. Check out and get close to live animals at the Conservation Station.

You may never be able to travel the world to seek out and observe these rare creatures but the Virginia Aquarium and Science Center's Restless Planet brings them all to us.

For more information, visit www.VirginiaAquarium.com.

Croc's 19th Street Bistro

To complete your trip to the Virginia Aquarium's Restless Planet exhibit, make sure to stop by to visit the "Green Queen" at Croc's 19th Street

Bistro.

The restaurant sponsors the Tomistoma crocodiles in the Restless Planet exhibit.

Croc's claim to fame is being the first restaurant to be certified green in Virginia. The program encourages sound environmental practices. Owner Laura Wood Habr is known as the "Green Queen." Rightly so because floors, counter tops, lighting, water savers and biodegradable take-out ware are just a few of the eco-friendly items at Croc's.

Cuisine is based on sustainable produce and seafood. Croc's offers typical Lebanese favorites along with eating mezze (little bites), an old Middle Eastern custom.

Menus include delicious, delectable and fresh seafood, steak, lamb and poultry along with an award winning wine list. Thursday nights rock with live bands or DJs, so you can show off your moves on the dance floor. Croc's is a wonderful gathering

place for a casual meal or planned party and close to the aquarium and the beach front.

For more information and events, visit www.crocs19streetbistro.com.

Also, on Saturdays mid-May through September, Croc's parking lot becomes a farmer's market promoting locally fresh vegetables, fruit, fish, herbs and wine. For information, visit www.oldbeachfarmersmarket.com.

The "Green Queen" is an avid supporter of the aquarium's Sensible Seafood Program helping to save our oceans and sea life. The seafood guide informs consumers of fresh or farmed and what is the best choice, a good alternative, or what to avoid.

For more information on the area, visit www.vbfun.com.

For more information on Mid-Atlantic getaways, visit www.tripsandgetaways.com.

The Holiday Inn of College Park

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(240) 542-1231

Mother's Day...

Is a perfect time of commemoration and celebration for Mom or that unique woman in your life. It is a time of family gatherings and crayon scribbled "I Love You's"

We wish you time to relax and laugh a little...and all the little pleasures you deserve on such a special day.

May your special day be filled with sunshine and each hour unfold with joy.

Happy Mother's Day from all of us!



Traditional Mother's Day Buffet

GRAND BALLROOM • Serving: 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

If you are looking for a spectacular place to have Mother's Day brunch with all the trimmings – then don't miss this one!
Featuring an endless display of mouth-watering delicacies, live entertainment, complimentary champagne and more...

Deluxe Omelet and Waffle Station • Farm Fresh Eggs • Bacon • Sausage • Breakfast Potatoes • Chef's Fresh Pastries • Freshly Prepared Salads
Soup Du Jour • Seasonal Fresh Fruit and Cheese Display • Deluxe Chilled Seafood Station featuring Crab Claws, Peel and Eat Shrimp, and Oysters on the Half Shell
Pasta Station • Chef's Deluxe Carving Station featuring Herb Crusted Prime Rib with Au Jus and Roasted Turkey
Entree Items to include Roasted Pork Loin, Chicken Florentine, and Crab Stuffed Salmon
Lobster Macaroni and Cheese • Mashed Potatoes • Seasonal Vegetables • Mother's Day Desserts • Coffee, Tea, and Champagne

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Reservations Suggested! Please Call (240) 542-1231

