
HLN

Take your family swimming with dolphins!

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On your next family vacation to the coast, you will likely see a "dolphin encounter program" advertised, as these attractions are increasing in popularity. Family Fun 411 spent time with the [Dolphin Connection](#) at [Hawks Cay](#) in the Florida Keys to learn about these experiences and what to expect. Here is what we learned you should look for:

There are different programs with different requirements... and costs.

Know what you are signing up for, and make sure your family meets the requirements. Programs include dockside experiences where you stay dry, swimming programs where you get in the water with them, and trainer for the day classes that give you a great deal of one-on-one interaction. Make sure you know in detail what you are getting, because a generic "Dolphin encounter" could just be a photo op.

Many programs also have restrictions in height, weight and age. Pregnancy and medical conditions might also limit your opportunity to participate.



Make sure the facility is dolphin-friendly.

You can be assured your children will fall in love with the dolphins they meet, so make sure it isn't at a place where their next reaction will be despair for how these dolphins are treated. Read reviews online and the details facilities

offer on care. Look for accreditations such as the [Alliance of Marine Mammals, Parks and Aquariums](#) and the [International Marine Animal Trainers' Association](#).

If you are going on a dolphin-watching excursion, the company should not be feeding or touching wild dolphins, or getting closer than 50 yards. You can check to see if they are listed nationally with the [NOAA Dolphin Safe Program](#) or this [internationally list](#) of recognized responsible programs.

Seize the education opportunity.

Check to see what they offer for you and your family to learn more about dolphins and their environment. This ranges from informational signs to full classes and videos explaining the dolphin physiology and their habitat. A key opportunity here is that dolphins can serve as **conservation ambassadors** for the marine environments where they live. So you can use this experience to get your kids invested in protecting oceans and marine life.

<http://www.hlnv.com/video/2015/06/18/take-your-family-swimming-dolphins>