

The many faces of Phuket

It's been called the 'Pearl of the Andaman Sea'. Phuket is the largest island in Thailand, and together with a collection of a number of other islands, forms the province of Phuket. It is a very popular tourist destination. Known for its scenic beauty, the beaches of Phuket promises a reinvigorating vacation. Be it friends hunting for an exciting holiday or couples looking for a romantic honeymoon or families seeking a relaxing getaway, Phuket does not let its visitors down. But it is not just the beaches that Phuket boasts. There is a range of places to visit and experiences to cherish, from exploring aquatic creatures to seeking spiritual solace. So set yourself free and let your mind boggle!

By M H Haider back from Thailand

Phuket Aquarium: What the fish!

Bold and the Beautiful; Young and the Restless; Beauty and the Beast...No we are not talking about soap operas and fairy tales here! But these titles of fiction have indeed popped up in my head when I visited Phuket Aquarium. Being the abode for myriad aquatic creatures, the public aquarium is a haven for fish of many kinds, shapes, sizes, forms, colours and temperaments.

Located at the southern tip of Cape Panwa on Phuket Island, the place is surrounded by enchanting bays and islands. Established in 1983, it is a major tourist destination for both locals and foreigners, attracting about 300,000 visitors a year.

Hundreds of thousands get awed by creatures beautiful and grisly and timid and intimidating.

A group of messmate pipefish, each just a few centimetres long, hang about in mid-water, 'standing' vertically upright. Meet the electric eel, which can produce a charge of 600 volts. Get up-close and personal with seahorses, tiny majestic creatures that loiter about.



My favourite, however, were the giant groupers. Having lived in an aquarium for over two decades, the giant groupers have indeed become, well, giants. The giant grouper is the 'Hummer' among fishes, if you will! Beefy and burly, it is in fact the largest coral reef fish in the world.

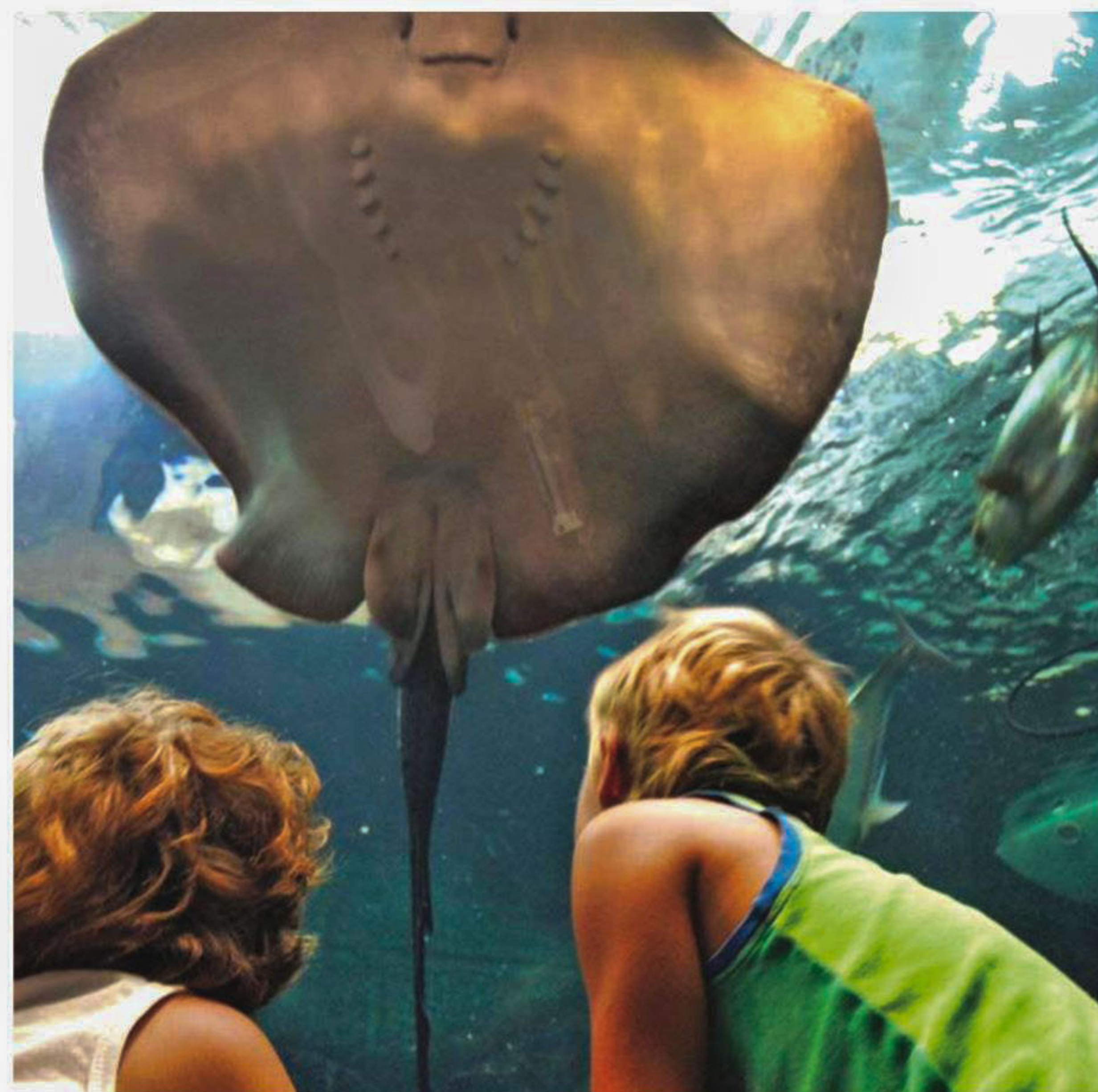
A walk through the Tunnel Tank should be an exciting experience. With water all around and above you, it's like you are walking right through the middle of the ocean whilst beautiful aquatic animals roam all around you.

The public aquarium can be an eye-opener and an amazing learning opportunity for the little ones in your family.

Regardless of age, for anyone, it is a window to the large and diverse world that lies underwater, and a chance to observe its impressive 'citizens' closely.

So, if you are planning a trip to Phuket, don't forget to include its public aquarium in your itinerary.

Photo: www.phuketaquarium.org



Phuket FantaSea: Myth. Mystery. Magic



Within the walls of FantaSea lies the Palace of the Elephants. It is, in fact, the heart of FantaSea, and surrounding it is a wide plethora of amusements and delicacies and entertainment. A realm.

The realm known as Phuket FantaSea is a massive and ambitious cultural theme park. Boasting theatrical performances, carnivals, games, handicraft demonstrations, elephant rides, shopping village and much more, the air in FantaSea is always thick with excitement and festivity. The pomp. The extravagance. The fervour. And the glittering lights and magnificent buildings and lavish costumes and cheers and laughter.

The Golden Kinnaree Buffet Restaurant,

to illustrate, is astonishingly gigantic. The 4000-seat eatery - which offers Thai and a variety of other cuisines - borrows its theme from the legendary Himmaphan Forest. Beautiful and gracious Kinnarees, half-bird and half-woman, serve the guests. Statues of these mythical creatures watch over the diners, who are surrounded by hand-painting wall murals of Thai classical art. Meanwhile, the carpet depicts the Anohdhard Pool where Kinnarees like to bath in. 'The World's Grandest Buffet', FantaSea has quite rightfully titled it.

Perhaps even grander than the Golden Kinnaree is the majestic building that is the Palace of the Elephants. It is, after all, the heart of Phuket FantaSea.