Great Maya Reef Exhibit Now Open

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New Orleans, LA (PRWEB) March 11, 2014 -- The new $1 million, 4200 square-foot Great Maya Reef exhibit at Audubon Aquarium of the Americas is now open, completely transforming the entrance of the Aquarium into a great, submerged Maya city of the Yucatan peninsula - a Meso-American reef whose magnitude is second only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

Walking though the 30-foot-long tunnel into the underwater world of the ancient, flooded Maya metropolis, visitors can imagine themselves immersed in the middle of mysterious, rusticated ruins deep below the ocean’s surface, surrounded by exotic sea creatures that thrive near one world’s largest reefs.

“We know guests are going to love how we’ve transformed this exhibit,” said Audubon President and CEO Ron Forman. “And we have more to come, with a number of expansive and innovative projects underway across all our Audubon attractions. It’s an exciting time for Audubon and for everyone who visits us.”

Visitors begin their underwater adventure through the Great Maya Reef, exploring the ruins of a submerged Maya city of mysterious ruins. Surrounded by lion fish, yellowtail snapper, moray eels, spiny lobsters and much more, guests engage with immersive exhibirity including:

After Dark
Day and night are two completely different worlds in the coral reef. Lively daytime activity fades into the domain of creatures thriving in the mysterious shadows of night. Fish such as the highhat spend days hanging out in caves, coming out to feed at night. Fish like the reef squirrelfish peek out from small crevices in their search for food. At nearly 6 feet tall and enhanced by corals and sponges, after dark is a rare opportunity to explore a world seldom seen by humans.

Artificial Reef
Coral reefs are critical to the health of the oceans. Corals and sponges colonize man-made objects such as oil platforms and sunken ships, taking advantage of solid “footing” these structures provide, along with the clear water and optimal warm temperatures. This exhibit is nearly 12 feet long and features a representation of Maya stone stairs. The incredible Caribbean spiny lobster lives here, using extra-long antennae to walk in single-file lines across open areas before settling in the shelter of the reef. The reef will also be home to yellowhead wrasse, surgeonfish, and bluehead wrasse.

Alien Invaders
This cylindrical exhibit, 96 inches in diameter, is home to the unmistakable lionfish. The beautiful and hypnotic lionfish may be fascinating to see, but it’s wreaking havoc throughout the Caribbean. Originally from the tropical Pacific, the introduction of lionfish to the Caribbean edges out native species. The lionfish is one of the most successful of the reef’s alien invaders. While destructive, with painful toxins loaded in hollow spines, there is no argument about the grace and beauty of the lionfish.

At Depth
As light travels to the ocean floor, it diffuses and loses intensity, supporting fish different from their sunnier
counterparts. This exhibit features a replica of a worn Maya wall and sponges such as the Convoluted orange sponge and the brown tube sponge. While these and other creatures seem strange to us, they are perfectly adapted to deeper water, sometimes boasting larger eyes and distinctive markings. Reef butterflyfish find their food in tight spaces between rocks, while the big-eyed cardinalfish, really red in coloration, looks completely black in deep water as the red wavelength of sunlight filters out on its way through the water. These deeper-water fish give us a compelling look at the persistence of life in extreme conditions.

King Copán
This is a cylindrical exhibit, 8 feet tall and 8 feet in diameter, beautifully embellished with a sunken Maya stone statue. It is home to the unforgettable and impressive green moray eel, which, as a sedentary predator, spends much of its time tucked between rocks waiting for prey. While it may look as if it is showing its sharp teeth in a threatening manner, the eel opens and closes its mouth to bring in water for oxygen.

Thematic lighting and interactive elements including state-of-the-art digital touchscreen graphics complete this spectacular experience for a perfect transition to the climb to the Amazon Rainforest Canopy.

About Audubon Nature Institute
Audubon Nature Institute is a 501(c)3 not for profit that operates a family of museums and parks dedicated to nature. These New Orleans facilities include: Audubon Park, Audubon Zoo, Woldenberg Riverfront Park, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center, Entergy IMAX® Theatre, Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species, Audubon Wilderness Park, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium and Audubon Nature Institute Foundation. Ron Forman is President and CEO of Audubon Nature Institute.
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