# The globally unique Dolphin Reef Eilat in Israel

Marine animal parks can be found worldwide, but none of them are as nature-friendly as the Dolphin Reef in Eilat, Israel.



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Found on the shores of the Red Sea, the ecological site offers visitors the opportunity to observe and swim alongside magnificent sea creatures, particularly bottlenose dolphins. Apart from offering fantastic views and a peaceful secluded beach, Dolphin Reef does not keep dolphins captive like many other parks. Instead, stretches of sea are home to the resident dolphins, providing them a natural habitat that is almost identical to the wild. The dolphins have the freedom to be released into the wide open oceans once the need is felt.

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## Diving with dolphins

Visitors can choose to see the dolphins from the floating piers and observation points or, for a more up-close experience, they can opt for guided swims or dives with the assistance of professional instructors.

Diving is an option for anyone between the ages of 8 and 88. The only requirement is knowing how to swim and no previous diving experience is needed for the six-metre dive – during which divers get to see the dolphins as well as a big variety of fish and corals.

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## Minimal human interference

Whatever the situation, the Reef is set up in a manner that makes it easy for dolphins to maintain their daily routine. With as minimal intervention as possible to their natural lifestyle and actions, the dolphins can unlimitedly interact and socialise with each other. They can play with one another and court each other without any human involvement whatsoever.

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Unlike most other parks, the animals at Dolphin Reef Eilat are not coerced into approaching divers or performing for them. Although human visitors can get close to the dolphins in their natural habitat, the contact between the two is never forced. This way, humans can build a stronger and more meaningful connection with dolphins based completely on free will. By minimising human intervention only to when it is essential, the quality of life of the resident animals is prioritised over any form of profit or personal human enjoyment.

## Dolphins helping people

Dolphins have been scientifically proven to induce positive thoughts in human beings who interact with them. Dolphin Reef offers what is known as ‘Supportive Experience with the aid of dolphins’.

Children aged 6 to 16, who are going through a difficult period in their lives, are able to enjoy time with a dolphin and a trainer. The aim of this initiative is to give the participants the necessary motivation and encouragement to face their struggles. The experience is especially targeted towards youngsters who are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Autism, Dyslexia, Down-Syndrome, depression and sexual abuse, amongst other challenges.



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## The “smile therapy”

Massimo Casabianca, an experienced diving instructor and DAN trainer, tells about his visit to Eilat:

*I was still working as a scuba instructor in Sharm el Sheikh when I got to know about a special dolphinarium located in Eilat, on the very tip of the Red Sea, the Yam Suf, or “Final Sea.” After lengthy negotiations with a Bedouin taxi driver, onboard a wrecked Peugeot 504, we decided to start this journey towards Israel.*

*When we reached Taba, the border point between Egypt and Israel, we left our trusty driver and continued walking towards the city center, until we saw a faded yellow and blue, triangular sign featuring a diver and a dolphin smiling: we had finally reached Dolphin Reef.*

*What we saw there was a small, fenced beach with a gulf where a group of dolphins was swimming in a completely natural environment, all orchestrated by a small dog running on the floating dock.*

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*The instructor and biologist who accompanied us made a very detailed briefing, recommending how to behave in the water, and how to interact with the dolphins... provided they would accept to meet us! He also spoke about the "smile therapy", a special therapy for children with behavioral disorders and various diseases. Years later I returned there with a young friend of mine suffering from Down syndrome, and I experienced firsthand the value of that therapy, and saw the birth of that smile...*

## Learning about dolphins

Building on all this, the site in Eilat offers specialised courses on dolphin biology and behaviour, as well as dolphin assisted therapy. Besides bringing humans closer to the environment and infusing in them the utmost of respect for their natural surroundings, Dolphin Reef has established itself as a scientific leader in

research on dolphins and other marine creatures.



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Simultaneously, a core value of the organisation is to be animal-friendly without prejudicing humans themselves, by mutually respecting both natural and human environments. Thanks to the physical condition of the site, which does not restrict the natural environment available to the dolphins, as well as the sensitive and warm attitude towards them, Dolphin Reef Eilat has successfully honed an extremely deep bond between man and the surrounding environment.

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**DOLPHIN REEF EILAT**, on the shores of the Red Sea, is an ecological site unique in Israel and throughout the world where visitors can enjoy a natural atmosphere, magical views, secluded beach, together with the unusual opportunity of meeting and observing dolphins in their natural habitat.

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