

plunge  
into the new  
lagoon  
aquarium

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new caledonia°



+ ON 30 AUGUST THE AQUARIUM DES LAGONS DE NOUVELLE CALÉDONIE OPENED IN NOUMEA ON THE ANSE VATA. BIGGER, BETTER AND MORE MODERN, THIS NEW AQUARIUM FEATURES THE JEWELS OF ITS PREDECESSOR: FLUORESCENT CORALS, TURTLES AND NAUTILUS. AND ALL SPECIES IN THE NEW COLLECTION ARE CALEDONIAN.

It has retained the ingenuity and spirit of Noumea's first aquarium – daylight passing through glass to light the many tanks filled with sea water pumped from a station at the Baie des Citrons. These were two of the Catala's ingenious ideas when they founded the original New Caledonian Aquarium in 1956.

But everything else has been re-thought – now visitors experience an aquatic environment ranging from freshwater to the depths of the ocean. Unlike most establishments of this kind, there's no mixing of different types; only New Caledonian species are shown in surroundings as near to natural conditions as possible.

Beyond the entrance, the vast hall instantly creates an aquatic atmosphere complete with the sound of a waterfall cascading over an entire translucent blue lit wall. There are cleverly conceived and designed panels to explain the history and function of coral reefs and the evolution of the tropical marine world.

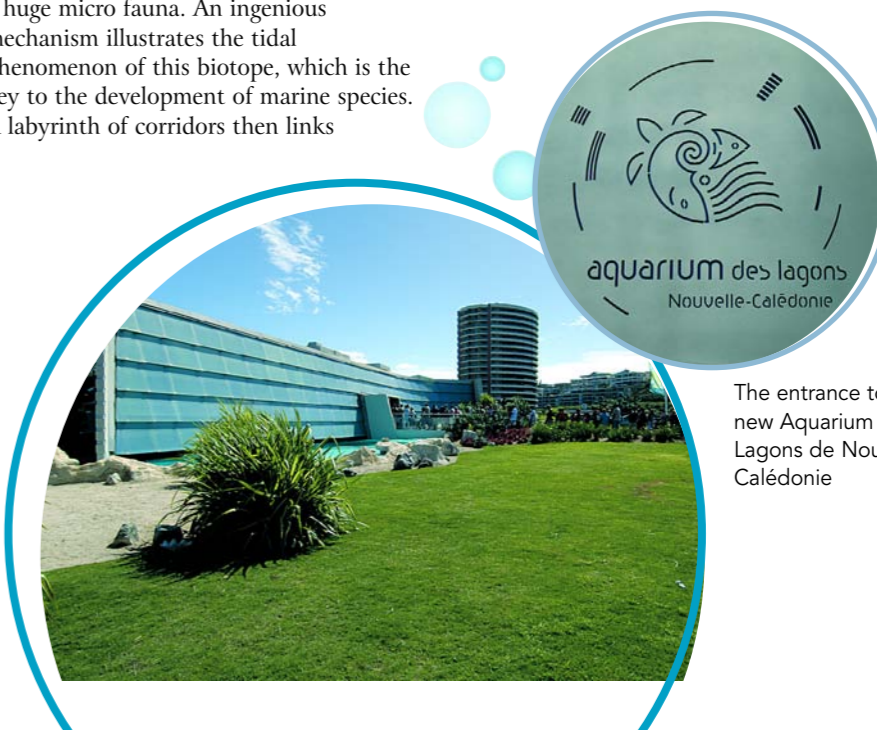
The bright spacious modern building contains 33 tanks varying in volume from 150 to nearly 400,000 litres in the largest. The first tanks are fresh water where most of the species found in local waterways coexist: the star, an albino eel, sometimes

emerges from its den to show off its leopard spotted coat. Fragile and small *Galaxia neocaledonicus*, rare endemic fish captured in the streams and small lakes in the far south of the Main Island, have a tank to themselves. Here they can escape predators which have no respect for a species, even if it is endangered.

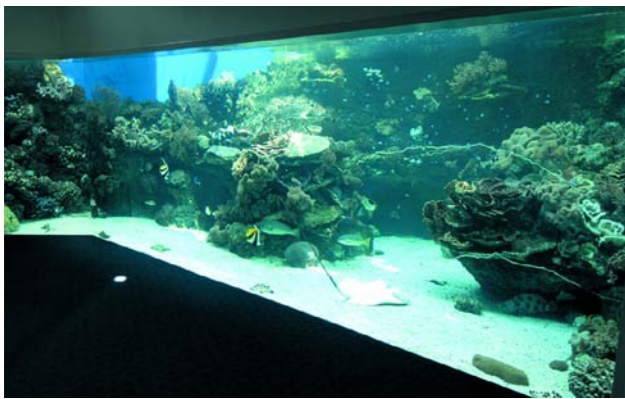
**RESPECTING THE BIOTOPE**  
The theme of brackish waters demonstrates where above and below water mix. The sketch of a mangrove shows how these plants plunge their roots deep into sea water, serving as a refuge for a huge micro fauna. An ingenious mechanism illustrates the tidal phenomenon of this biotope, which is the key to the development of marine species. A labyrinth of corridors then links

different rooms where themed and mini tanks show diverse organisms, such as that strange crustacean, a striped mantis crab, a solitary and feared predator at home in his re-created gallery. The very dangerous stonefish, usually buried in the silt, is on show and the equally toxic scorpionfish parade their sumptuous livery. Plenty of well-placed signage helps visitors identify and learn about these fascinating organisms.

**LEARNING BY TOUCH**  
The tactile tank is a wonderful interactive space for children who always want to



The entrance to the new Aquarium des Lagons de Nouvelle Calédonie



Left top to bottom: Lagoon tank; Tree goldlined rabbitfishes; Babies Caretta caretta; Léon the Maori Wrasse is the oldest fish living in Nouméa's aquarium.  
Right top to bottom: Scorpionfish; Nautilus tank; The Nautilus macromphallus is endemic to New Caledonia; Deliverance of a Moorish Idol.

touch rather than just look. They're able to handle inoffensive and simple marine species such as crustaceans, pencil sea urchins, holothurians, starfish and shells.

Two major tanks replicate the lagoon. The first, which has more invertebrates, contains, amongst other things, two colonies of corals 'born' in the old aquarium over 40 years ago. The transparent façade of the second covers an entire wall from floor to ceiling and the natural environment is perfectly reproduced here – greatly diverse fauna in a natural living decor. The realism of this biotope is astonishing; the surface of a complete wall is regularly agitated by a series of bubbling mini-waves. Live madrepoles flourish due to their moving polyps catching nourishing plankton and the presence of many invertebrates enriches the tank and closely represents what divers see in the lagoon. The high quality is due to detailed reproduction by the highly professional team responsible for capturing and ensuring the adaptation of marine species to their life in captivity.

**JEWELS OF THE SEA**

Next, visitors share in a magical encounter with fluorescent corals in a dark room with ultraviolet lighting. The earlier aquarium's fluorescent corals were world-famous and it was

the only one to publicly display them since 1957. The colours of the living part of the corals range from dark green to bright yellow through a series of reds and oranges – extraordinary magical shapes and colours generated by the Pacific's most beautiful living jewels.

But the centrepiece of this exhibit is a 400 cubic metre tank visible from three different angles which takes visitors to the ocean depths just outside an imaginary coral barrier reef. Here are found large specimens such as sharks, carangids, rockling and batfish. Residents from the old building are happily rediscovered: the huge bullhead shark, the oldest fish 'Léon' the giant wrasse, plus the green and scaled lagoon turtles.

The exhibits end with another dark area; centrally placed is a transparent column with fauna from abyssal depths in water cooled to 15°C. At the bottom rest crabs from the deep. There's also a rare sight, a parade of nautilus. This mythical and mysterious animal, unchanged for millions of years, is the only cephalopod mollusc with an external shell. *Nautilus macromphallus* is endemic to the New Caledonia archipelago and develops in depths between 150 and 300 metres. The shell of this extraordinary living fossil develops in a logarithmic spiral which

Useful information  
Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m to 5 p.m, Route de l'Anse Vata.  
[www.aquarium.nc](http://www.aquarium.nc)

is divided into sections, in the last of which the animal lives. In 2000 two baby nautilus were bred in captivity in the former building and there will certainly be more births in these new surroundings.

**PRESERVATION OF THE LAGOON**  
L'Aquarium des lagons is much more than just a showcase for tourists. It's a fabulous tool which participates in the promotion, conservation and the protection of the country's different aquatic environments. The educational aspect is also important – two rooms are available for groups or classes for special guided tours. The first, for teaching purposes, has an overhead projector, and a magnetic wall for temporary placing of tanks. The second room, suitable for conferences, has a large retractable screen and independent audio circuit. A scientific laboratory will be also developed to support existing collaborative scientific programs with researchers from the Institut pour le Développement (IRD) and the Université de Nouvelle-Calédonie.

