

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coral World Announces Construction Of In-Ocean Dolphin Habitat

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ST. THOMAS -- Coral World Ocean Park announced on Tuesday that it has received all necessary permits to commence construction on its state-of-the-art in-ocean dolphin habitat. The dolphin facility is expected to provide a much-needed boost to the St. Thomas tourism product and will significantly expand the opportunities at Coral World for residents and visitors to engage with marine animals and learn from those experiences, Coral World said.

"We expect the first barges carrying equipment and materials to arrive on March 7. Once they clear customs, they will head to Water Bay to position for construction work," said Coral World General Curator, Lee Kellar.

The landside Dolphin Education Center was completed about a year ago and served as housing for a large number of employees during and after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. In response to the desire of cruise lines to return to St. Thomas as quickly as possible, Coral World staff moved swiftly to restore operations, according to General Manager Trudie Prior. The park reopened on November 12 and has been offering guided tours as well as several activities despite the loss of a couple of major exhibits.

Coral World expects the major components of the facility to be completed in July. The company said it has been accredited since 2015 by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (A.M.M.P.A.). "The Coral World facility will meet the most stringent federal standards and A.M.M.P.A. standards and guidelines," assured Mr. Keller.

He added: "We had a top-notch marine engineering firm Moffat & Nichol review and refine our plans so that we are confident the design of this facility is environmentally sensitive and will provide an excellent home for the dolphins."

Once construction on the in-ocean dolphin habitat is completed, Coral World said it will bring the initial six dolphins allowed under its Coastal Zone Management permit to their new home. "We won't begin programs immediately as the dolphins will need some time to adjust. Our trainers will work with them to ensure they are comfortable in this new setting. We hope the public will be able to interact with the dolphins by late fall," Mr. Keller said.

Since its reopening in 1998 under current ownership, Coral World says it has espoused the view of Baba Dioum, a noted Senegalese naturalist who is credited for stating, "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."