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The New Sant Ocean Hall Opens Sept. 27 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

The ocean is Earth's final frontier, covering 71 percent of the planet's surface; it is largely unknown and unexplored. The Smithsonian will showcase the current understanding of the ocean and its many connections to humans as only it can with the opening of the extraordinary Sant Ocean Hall on Saturday, Sept. 27, at the National Museum of Natural History. The Sant Ocean Hall is the largest renovation in the museum since it opened in 1910. The hall's combination of 674 marine specimens and models, high-definition video experiences, one-of-a kind exhibits and the newest technology allows visitors to explore the ocean's past, present and future as never before.

The hall is named for Victoria and Roger Sant and family, Washington philanthropists and Smithsonian supporters, who donated \$15 million to endow the new hall and related programs and outreach activities. The hall is founded on the museum's unparalleled collection (the largest marine collection in the world, with more than 80 million specimens) allowing the Smithsonian to offer the most comprehensive exhibition in the country devoted to a global view of the ocean.

The Sant Ocean Hall was created in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to show the ocean as a global system that is essential to all life on Earth. The exhibition refers to ocean in the singular because the ocean is one huge, interconnected body of water that spans several basins.

Visitors entering the 23,000-square-foot exhibition will see a precise replica of a 45-foot-long North Atlantic right whale, named Phoenix, who has been tracked by scientists since her birth in 1987, and a giant squid—so rarely seen that a living squid was not caught on camera until 2004. A unique underwater experience is created by "Ocean Odyssey," a high-definition film by renowned underwater cinematographer Feodor Pitcairn, which wraps the walls above the exhibit space. And, like the real ocean, the deeper visitors explore the more they will discover—from the sunlit surface to the dark, pitch-black ocean depth, from the smallest microorganisms to the biggest animals ever known.

"The ocean is a vast ecosystem essential to all life, including our own, yet scientific and public understanding of the ocean is still limited and most people are not aware of the profound impacts of humans on marine life," said Museum Director Cristián Samper. "That's why the new Sant Ocean Hall,

the most ambitious renovation in the museum's history, is so vital and timely. It will greatly expand our knowledge of this extraordinary ocean planet we call home. Through its unparalleled collections, multimedia experiences and ongoing educational outreach and public programming, we hope this permanent exhibition will raise awareness of the importance of the ocean and the impact of human activities on marine life."

"For thousands of years people looked across the ocean and asked, 'What lies beyond?' Today we ask, 'What lies below?' and ocean explorers with new technologies are finding answers to those deep mysteries," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Ocean Hall is unsurpassed in connecting people, in exciting ways, with the information needed to protect and manage our ocean and its resources."

The North Atlantic right whale model hanging from the hall's ceiling is an exact replica of "Phoenix," a living female whale. Phoenix was an ideal candidate for the model because she has been tracked throughout her life and scientists know so much about her. The Phoenix model, a signature piece of the Sant Ocean Hall, is accompanied by an exhibit about the evolution of whales from their land ancestors, as well as their centuries-long connection to humans.

Phoenix holds the central spot as the Ocean Hall ambassador, but there are 10 other sections in the hall that address a variety of ocean-related topics, including the deep ocean, coral reefs, the Arctic and Southern Oceans and current ocean research. The Coral Reef section has a 1,500-gallon aquarium featuring an Indo-Pacific reef with over 1,000 specimens of more than 50 different species of live fish and other marine life. The hall's "Journey through Time" section looks into the past with fossils of a large number of ancient organisms; some are more than 500 million years old. In the exhibit's theater, a 13-minute video, "Deep Ocean Explorers," takes visitors on a dive through the zones of the open ocean to the deep ocean bottom aboard the submersible, *Alvin*.

There are many strange and wonderful animals in the Sant Ocean Hall, but perhaps none as mysterious as the giant squid. The museum has two giant squids on display in the new hall: The larger of the two is a 24-foot-long female specimen suspended in 1,800 gallons of a special, nontoxic, nonflammable, clear fluid developed by 3M Company.

The hall also is the only place in the world to exhibit both an adult coelacanth (SEE-la-kanth) and its pup. This prehistoric fish was thought to have gone extinct 65 million years ago, until a fisherman caught one off the coast of South Africa in 1938.

The Ocean and Humans

The Sant Ocean Hall, unlike many traditional exhibition halls, is not just about looking at objects and reading signs. Visitors will play an active role in it. The hall's "Living on an Ocean Planet" gallery will inspire visitors to make the connection between the ocean and their daily lives. There are more than 30 "Human Connection" stories told throughout the hall, highlighting the intricate and often delicate interrelationship between humans and the ocean. Visitors will learn this firsthand by making important decisions about critical ocean issues and seeing the ramifications of these choices by taking the helm as a commercial fisheries manager to see what they can do to eliminate their individual carbon footprint.

One of the highlighted ocean and human relationships is that of Native Americans—symbolized by a 26-foot carved canoe given to the hall by the Tlingit (KLING-ket) Nation. The northwest Pacific Coast became the most heavily populated Native American region because of the reliable bounty of the ocean's resources. Special exhibits enable visitors to learn about the canoe's construction and its significance, as well as many ocean-related crafts and ceremonies.

Telling the Story with Technology

The Sant Ocean Hall also is greatly enhanced by technological components, information and images that cannot be found on the Internet. "Science on a Sphere" is a room-sized, 360-degree global display system created by researchers at NOAA using computers and projectors to display information on a six-foot-wide sphere. Animated images and narration explain many of the complex aspects of the ocean, such as what the ocean produces, how it changes and how it interacts with the atmosphere to moderate our climate.

The Smithsonian has partnered with the History channel to tell the story of "The Ocean as a Laboratory." There are seven audiovisual stories and supplemental photo essays introducing the exciting work of marine scientists around the world. A large map and photo essays supplement the video stories with additional stories on cutting-edge marine science. Visitors to the hall will not only learn hundreds of new things about the ocean and its inhabitants, but also get the facts behind the stories at stations that are placed throughout the exhibition. These interpretive areas will help people see that our understanding and appreciation of the ocean is due to science and research.

Project Funding

The total cost of the exhibition was \$49 million. NOAA contributed \$22 million to the Sant Ocean Hall exhibition. In addition, the entire ocean project, including educational outreach and public programs, was supported by donations from individuals, foundations and corporations, including Victoria and Roger Sant, the 3M Company (cash and in-kind donations), Ocean Conservancy, Guenther and Siewchin Yong Sommer, Sony Electronics Inc. (cash and in-kind donations), JAMSTEC and an anonymous donor—all of whom donated \$1 million or more to the museum.

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