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Wide-angle view: The main tank of the new California Academy of Sciences' coral reef display offers visitors views of the 212,000 gallons of water and diverse ecosystem through the floor-to-ceiling glass walls. ALL: CINDY CHEW/THE EXAMINER



NEW Lives at the California Academy of Sciences

New city mainstay features thousands of creatures that crawl, swim and hop around facility dedicated to sustainable practices

By Tamara Barak Aparton
Examiner Staff Writer

From the albino alligator basking in its swamp to the rolling hills of wildflowers serving as its roof, the California Academy of Sciences is bubbling with life.

After a decade of planning, the museum will open to the public Sept. 27.

The academy kept many of its iconic displays, such as the dioramas of taxidermic animals that have graced the African Hall since 1934. But it also added live penguins, more multimedia exhibits and a living rainforest. Light pours into airy, open galleries from every direction.

The 38,000 animals of the Steinhart Aquarium, once confined to their own hall, appear throughout the academy. In the Rainforests of the World exhibit, visitors are enveloped in humidity, plant and animal life.

Authenticity was key to designing the rainforest, Steinhart Aquarium Director Chris Andrews said Thursday during a media preview of the facility.

"We want people to experience it like a rainforest, not someone's tended backyard," he said.

A strong focus on conservation and sustainability is infused with many of the exhibits. The academy's T-Rex skeleton hovers above "Altered State: Climate Change

in California," as if to remind visitors of species now extinct. The exhibit explores the science of climate change and the steps necessary to mitigate it. Families can measure their own carbon footprint and videotape a promise to conserve.

"It's easier to make a promise when you make it to someone else, especially if your kids are watching you," said Carol Tang, director of visitor interpretive programs.

The academy also boasts the world's largest all-digital planetarium. Data from NASA guide visitors on the most accurate digital universe ever created, said Ryan Wyatt, director of Morrison Planetarium and Science Visualization.

Meanwhile, school groups and students will find 210,000 books, 25,000 maps, 300,000 images and 20 million animals, plants, minerals and cultural artifacts in the academy's library and research collections.

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Attractive attraction

The new California Academy of Sciences building in Golden Gate Park is just days away from opening its doors.

- **Opening:** Sept. 27 (free admission)
- **Location:** 55 Music Concourse Drive, Golden Gate Park
- **Hours:** 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday; closed Thanksgiving and Christmas
- **Price to visit:**

Adult	\$24.95
Child (6 and under)	Free
Child (7-11)	\$14.95
Youth (12-17)	\$19.95
Student 18+ (ID required)	\$19.95
Senior 65+ (ID required)	\$19.95
- The new Academy of Sciences building incorporates the Steinhart Aquarium, the Morrison Planetarium and the Kimball Natural History Museum under one living roof.
- Free days are offered every third Wednesday of the month.
- San Francisco residents will be offered Neighborhood Free Days from May 1 to June 14 and from Sept. 11 to Oct. 25, 2009. To learn more about Neighborhood Free Days, visit www.calacademy.org.

Source: California Academy of Sciences

FLORA
Along with the animals in the Academy of Sciences, there is also a rain forest housed under the roof.

FAUNA
Smaller animals, such as the beaded lizard, are on display in the Water Planet exhibit while larger animals, such as whales, are shown via multimedia presentations.

