

TOI Explores Little-Known Museums In A 7-Part Series

A glimpse of India's diverse marine wealth

Jipson Sikhera



OF SEAS AND OCEANS: A young visitor amid bottled exhibits at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. Right, a scientist explains the exhibits to a group of children at the museum

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Kochi: The city is said to be the fisheries hub of India and hence it is apt that it should house the national marine museum. At the entrance, you feel as if entering the biology lab of an institution, but as you move from one exhibit to the next, it would turn into a fascinating tour of the mysterious world of oceans and seas.



Bottled in glass jars, the specimens that adorn the shelves of the marine biodiversity museum situated on the 6th floor of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute have been properly labelled with all scientific details. The collection of specimens started way back in the 60s and has grown with new entries over the years.

The latest entrant is a sea hare, which was caught and brought from Tamil Nadu waters. "The sea hare is not edible but has suddenly evoked a lot of interest as it is said to have a compound that could cure can-

cer. It will be exploited and hence we have immediately got a few species for preservation," said K K Joshi, head, department of marine biodiversity.

Around 2,486 specimens including algae, corals, sponges, different kind of fishes, marine mammals, etc. have been frozen using preservatives in glass jars. Around 125 species of corals that could only be seen in the Lakshadweep or Andaman Islands can be found here. Some of the corals were once used building houses on the islands but now coral mining is banned. The oyster section is fascinating. One of the largest pearl oyster found in the country is also housed here.

The biggest attractions in the gallery that houses large fishes include dolphins, sharks, rays and eels. The jars have frozen specimen of marine organisms larger than man. "Many of the species have been brought by fishermen. They bring it to our offices across the country."

This museum is not just a visitors' museum. It is the most-sought after by academicians and students alike. "If a

WHAT
To collect, preserve, catalogue & display marine species

WHERE
CMFRI, Kochi

VISITING TIME
9.30am to 4.30pm
Monday - Saturday

new species is caught, it is kept in safe custody here. This is a place where the authentication of a marine species happens," he said.

You will get to see a lot of endangered species too. "We have now started making a marine herbarium of sea weeds. It is difficult to make a herbarium from a marine plant because of its salt content," Joshi said.

The value of this museum is realized when foreign scholars want to confirm the presence of any marine organism, which is native to the country's waters. Then they contact the officials here and it is from this repository that the scientific confirmation is given.