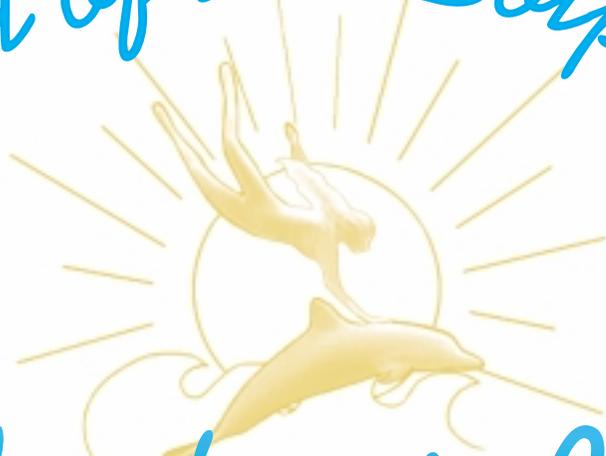


Call of the Dolphin



An Adventure in Paradise

by ANNA KIRIN

A warm breeze greets me as I walk down the steps from the aircraft. The view from the plane had been tantalizing — a long narrow island covered by jungle and surrounded by aquamarine waves breaking along the reefs. Already I can feel myself relaxing to a different rhythm. Other members of our group squint in the sunlight as they rummage for hats and sunglasses. We were on a quest — to spend a week with one of the more fascinating and loveable creatures of the sea — the bottlenose dolphin!

Our destination was Anthony's Key, a secluded resort on the northwestern shore of the island of Roatan. Part of the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras, Roatan is best known for its excellent diving and sailing.

The resort itself is refreshingly clean and authentic. An open-air restaurant nestled into a hillside jungle overlooks a lagoon with two private keys or islets. Accommodations consist of wooden bungalows, on the hillside or on one of the small keys that is reached by a 24-hour taxi-



Anna Kirin

Up-close and personal in a dolphin encounter.

boat. Guests enjoy afternoon siestas and fiery sunsets from the privacy of their own hammocks as the hectic world of telephones and freeways fades into the past.

Our introduction to the dolphins begins early the next morning. Eldon, the director for the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences (RIMS), a marine biology center located on the premises, greets us at the dock. "If you'd been up a

little earlier, you could have cleaned fish!" he jokes.

Except, as we discover, he is serious. Dolphins eat a lot of fish! Here at Anthony's, three times a day in fact — a healthy mixture of herring and capelin. As the week progresses, we discover that cleaning fish and feeding time are a wonderful way to spend private time with the dolphins!

Before meeting the dolphins we are introduced to the trainers, a group of young islanders, who keep us entertained with a continuous stream of dolphin anecdotes and stories. "Okay, everyone, the boat's leaving," calls Latté, one of the trainers, a huge grin stretched across his face.

First Encounter

With snorkel gear in hand, we stumble over each other to find a seat, and our boat motors across the bay to Bailey's Key where the dolphins of Anthony's live in a large protected area.

The sand is soft and white; the water is warm and inviting. Ahead of us we can see the dolphins dive and cavort. Before engaging in our first free-swim with the dolphins we are treated to an encounter session.

We waded into waist-high

Trend Tracker: Dolphin Encounter



ON THE EDGE

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water and in small groups, with our own individual trainer and a single dolphin, we learn about dolphin etiquette.

The first step lies in establishing a sense of safety and rapport with the dolphin, using gentle but firm gestures and soothing voices. For the first time we stroke the dolphin — the skin is silky smooth.

We watch as the trainer "stations" the dolphin with his palm extended towards its rostrum so he has the dolphin's full and undivided attention. The trainer then gives hand signals and the dolphin enthusiastically nods, laughs, and slaps her fluke on the water, showering us with spray. Two of the youngest dolphins in the pod, Maury and Li'l Bill, brush past me, curious about the newcomers.

The rest of the morning is spent free-swimming with the dolphins as we try to recall

key techniques. Move slowly. Stay calm. Let them come to you. We enter into the dream-like world of dolphinese. I try to mimic the fluid dolphin kick and feel silly as they gracefully glide by me.

As I become accustomed to my mask and snorkel I start diving down to the bottom and up again. This fascinates the dolphins, who love to play.

Sea Grass and Shells

By my second swim I am no longer intimidated by these graceful creatures but see them instead as companions and playmates. I notice that some of them are carrying pieces of sea grass between their teeth and on their flippers. I find some grass and wave it enticingly as a dolphin approaches. Gently I toss the sea grass in his direction. He catches it between his teeth and then blows it back to me again. I catch it with my

hand and return the toss. The game continues. We're playing catch!

I notice white clam shells

gleaming on the bottom. Quickly, I kick my way down to pick up this new treasure. Back

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Dolphins do the "tailwalk" in a training session.

Anna Kirin

At Madrid's intimate Casa Patas, considered by many to be the best place to see flamenco in Spain's capital, we savored our final flamenco *tablaó* at midnight. With the audience's verbal encouragement, the singers, guitarists, and the dancers, sweat trickling down their faces, abandoned themselves to *duende*, the soulful trance-like state to which they aspire.

With its intermingling of the Moorish and gypsy cultures, flamenco shows how different worlds can come together to generate enduring beauty. Not only did I see the royal court of flamenco on that trip, I also gained insight into Andalusia's past and present: its pulse, spirit and essence. When I resumed my flamenco lessons back home, I noticed I danced better, with more emotion. Perhaps a bit of *duende* returned with me. ■

For information on *Flamenco Tour* (formerly *Andalus Tours*), contact Eric Schnell: Phone: 408-504-6017; Website: www.flamenco-tour.com; E-mail: info@flamenco-tour.com.

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near the surface I dangle the new toy in front of me. A young dolphin approaches, and another amazing game of catch ensues.

Suddenly, I miss and drop the clamshell, which slowly sinks out of reach. The dolphin and I watch the shell disappear and I think, "Should I get it or will you?" In that instant the dolphin spirals down to retrieve the shell, then "hands" it back to me as he returns to the surface. I laugh and sputter as my mask fills with water. The dolphin shakes his head. Sensing an interruption to the game, he turns and is gone. What could top this?

Dolphin Ride

How about getting a ride from a dolphin? Guided by a trainer I hold onto a dolphin's dorsal fin. The dolphin then streaks through the water at high speed, depositing me back at the starting point.

As the week continues, we realize that we have become a

new kind of family — a family made up of humans and of dolphins. We learn signals for new behaviors which we communicate in our own clumsy way, while the dolphins chatter and whistle and seem amused by us. They respond to our gestures by jumping high into the air or streaking across the lagoon.

The young dolphins seem especially curious about us, seeking attention by being silly, annoying, or just too cute — all of which are irresistible.

As they grow up and learn to interact with humans, they too will win the hearts of future visitors with games of catch and playful rides through blue lagoons. ■

For more information on *Dolphin Trainer for a Week Programs*, contact Dolphin Press — TEL: (415) 460-9910; E-mail: karin@dolphinpress.com; Website: www.dolphinpress.com; or *The Fire Within, Inc.* — TEL: (510) 653-FIRE; E-mail: jon@thefirewithin.com; www.thefirewithin.com/swimwithdolphins.htm.

Travel Tips

- Daytime temperatures in Roatan average 80 degrees, with a few days of rain and high winds in late fall and early winter. The trade winds provide natural air-conditioning.
- Although the Honduran currency is the Lempira, U.S. dollars are accepted throughout the island.
- Taca Airlines flies to Roatan; visit <http://www.taca.com>. Flights leave on a daily basis from major U.S. cities, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami and Houston.
- Although Spanish and Creole are used by the native islanders, English is commonly spoken.
- A dive shop is available at the resort for wetsuit and snorkel equipment rentals.

Dolphin Dreamtime

Dolphin was traveling the oceans one day as Grandmother Moon was weaving the patterns of the tides. Grandmother Moon asked dolphin to learn her rhythms so that he could open his female side to her silvery light.

Dolphin began to swim to the rhythm of her tide weaving, and learned to breathe in a new way. As Dolphin continued to use this new rhythm, he entered the Dreamtime ...

Dolphin learned that all communication was pattern and rhythm, and that the new aspect of communication was sound; he carries this original pattern to this day. Dolphin returned to the ocean of the Great Mother, and was very sad until Whale came by and told dolphin that he could return to be a messenger to the Dreamtime dwellers anytime he felt the rhythm and used the breath. Dolphin was given a new job. He became the carrier of messages for our progress. The Dreamtime dwellers were curious about the children of Earth, and wanted us to grow to be at one with Great Spirit. Dolphin was to be the link.

— from *Medicine Cards*, by Jamie Sams & David Carson (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear & Co., 1988)