

## EXPLORE INDOOR WATERFALLS AND RIVERS AT NATUREQUEST

Written by: *Brendan Brehm* | Wednesday, December 14th, 2011

The NatureQuest exhibit at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History in Atlanta, Georgia is making quite a splash among young children and their parents. The amazing thing is that the splash leaves everyone dry. Even after the kids have spent the day running through waterfalls, chasing fish down a river, and exploring tide pools, they'll leave the museum just as dry as when they walked in. They will, however, leave with a new understanding and appreciation of the Southeast's diverse ecosystems. NatureQuest invites children to explore the different ecosystems using all their senses and to learn through activity what makes each one unique and important.

The hands-on environments at NatureQuest were created by Thinkwell Group, an experiential design firm that has worked on numerous high-profile projects, such as the Wizarding World of Harry Potter and Ski Dubai, the indoor ski resort in the Mall of the Emirates. In the case of NatureQuest, they've called on their experience in designing large-scale immersive environments to create an interactive learning space in which every square inch begs to be explored. The 7,000 square foot space introduces children to six different ecosystems found throughout Georgia and other southern states. Each ecosystem is brought to life through a combination of physical scenery, animal sculptures, sound, and interactive and projected media.

Getting back to what we mentioned earlier about exploring rivers and waterfalls while staying completely dry, let's take a look at some of these features. One of the highlights at NatureQuest is definitely the Virtual River. The river, which runs through most of the exhibit, is a

life-like projection of a flowing river teeming with fish. Kids can step right into this river, but they might have a hard time catching the fish because motion tracking software captures their movement and sends the fish swimming away. Upstream you'll reach a virtual waterfall that uses similar projection technology to create the illusion of falling water. You can step right through it into a cave without a drop hitting your head.



NatureQuest also takes you beneath the sea where you'll find 700 different corals, sponges, and marine creatures living among the rocks and pillars. The blue lighting and realistic terrain creates an aquatic atmosphere that you can explore for hours on end without any scuba gear.

Back on dry land, the multi-level clubhouse sets the stage for even more adventures. The clubhouse is jam-packed with pictures, models, and games all relating to the surrounding ecosystems and their inhabitants. Through the clubhouse, you can reach the rope bridges which wind through the treetops and afford a bird's-eye view of all the surrounding habitats.

At NatureQuest, you can't turn around without finding yourself on the trail of another adventure or animal. The floor is literally covered in tracks made by 11 different animal species. Follow the tracks and you're sure to find the critter that left them behind on their way home. It is exactly this kind of investigation and discovery that makes NatureQuest such a dynamic and enriching experience.

**To view the source article, follow this link:** <http://entertainmentdesigner.com/news/museum-design-news/explore-indoor-waterfalls-and-rivers-at-naturequest/>