The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2026.05.03
Mote SEA, Sarasota, Florida



RoadMode2026 started much the same as the three prior iterations: re-semi-retire (again) around May 1st and head north. It's an easy choice; the only road out of Key West aims that way. But rather than beelining out of Florida, I linger for a week in the Sunshine State. There is one more photo/journalist assignment up in Jacksonville – the State High School Track & Field Championships -- so I do some in-state stuff for a few days on the way.

First up: the new Mote Science Education Aquarium (SEA) in Sarasota. I do like aquariums and zoos. Though I always feel a bit sad for Nature's creatures who are imprisoned in them, rather than living a free life in the wild. But I console myself with a two notions:

First, most of them would be dead if they weren't in their controlled environments. Maybe not the sharks and lions and similar apex predators, or the whale sharks and other behemoths, but all those pretty little fishies would have been a snack long ago. Likewise with meerkats and antelope and such. So, they may be in jail, but at least they don't have to worry 24/7 about being eaten alive.



(By the way, I have often given thanks that our species is one of the few that does not eat our food while its still living. Fish gulp live fish, birds swoop in and grab living critters, live insects get gobbled all the time. I'm glad my food is already dead and prepped by the time I consume it.

Hey, even fishermen bring their catch home and cook it. It'd gross me out to watch some angler pull a Gollum and chomp into his mahi right on the boat.)



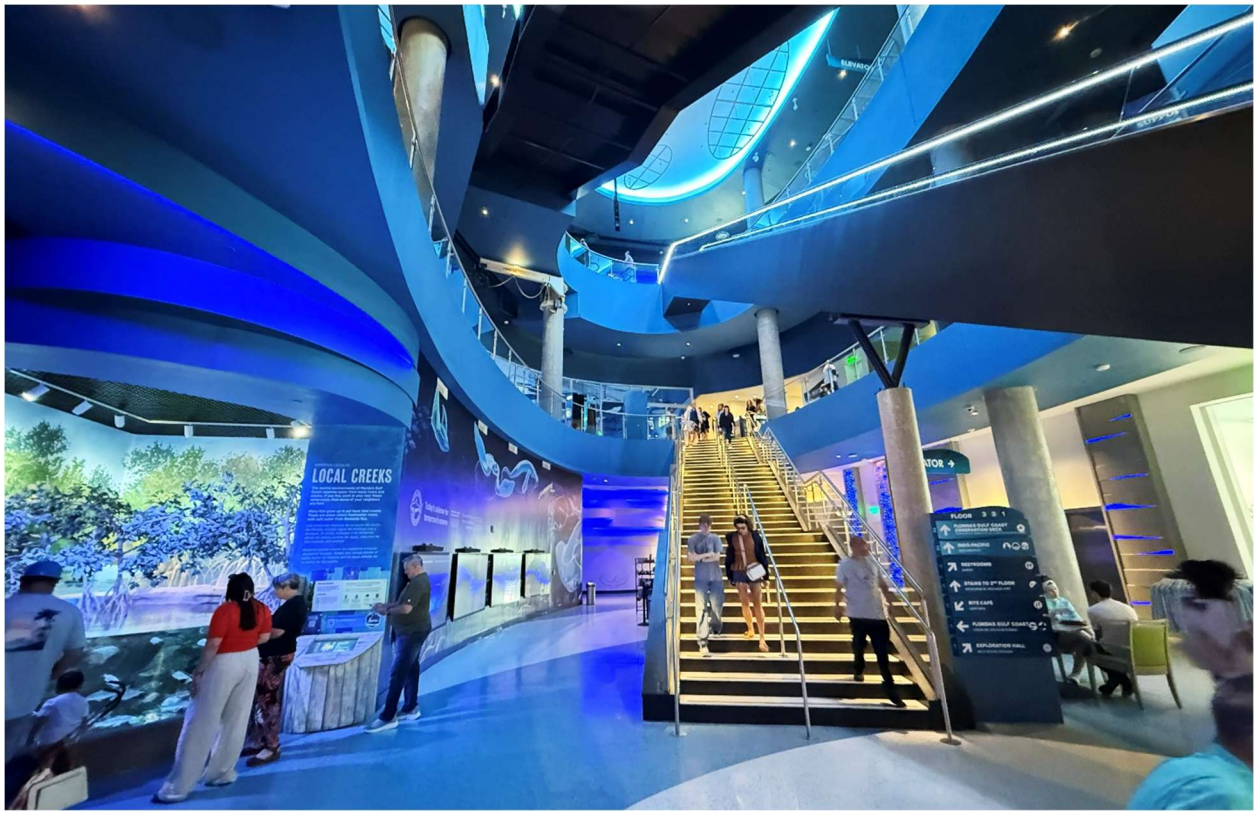
The second notion is that they don't have to agonize over catching their food so they can eat today. I know that runs counter to their instincts and yada yada, but it's not the worst thing to have their victuals brought to them on a regular basis and in ample portion.

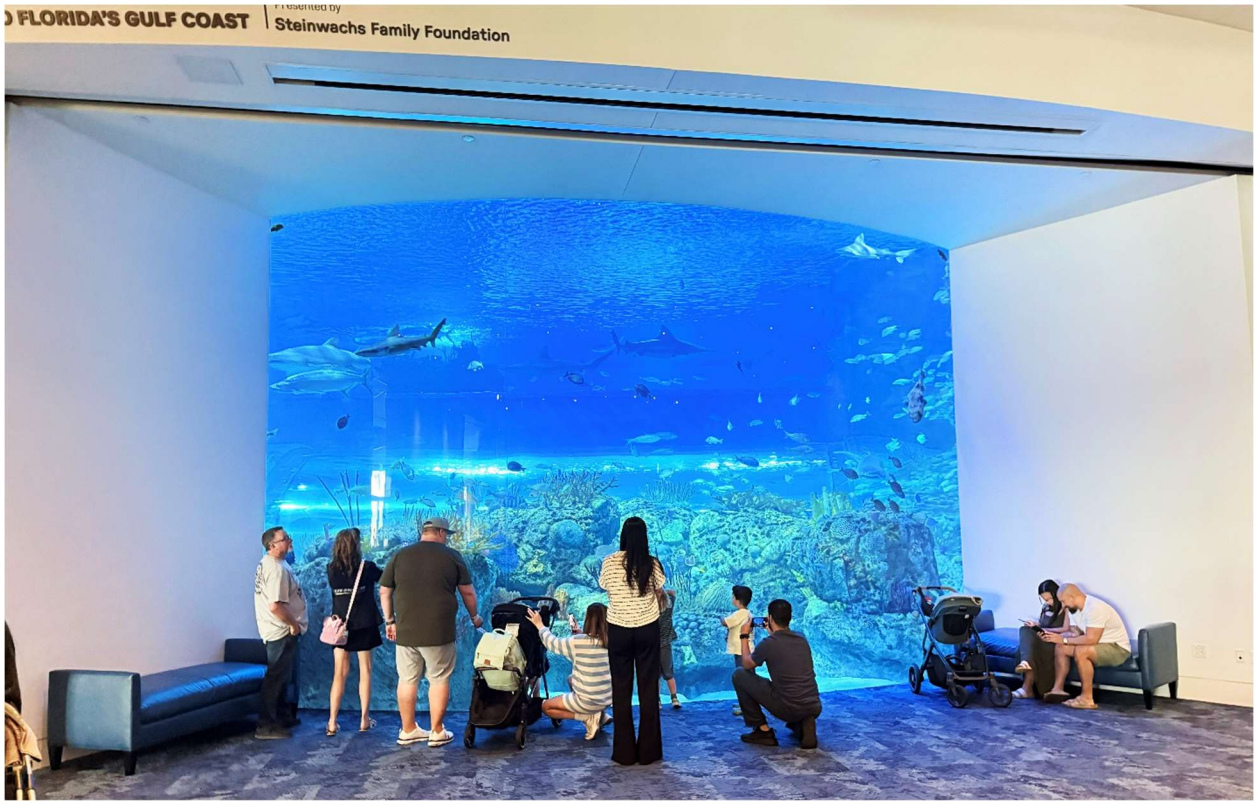
I don't know how any animal raised in captivity could ever adapt to life in the wild. They'd be looking at the sun's position in the sky and thinking, "Shouldn't that cute girl be bringing me my plate of meat about now?" The taste of hot blood from their first fresh kill would be a rude awakening.

But I digress, and I haven't even started. Neat trick.

Mote SEA was completed in 2024, containing more than a million gallons of water – including a 400,000-gallon Gulf of Mexico tank – which is home to 350+ species (including 9 species of sharks) in 146,666 square feet of aquarium space.

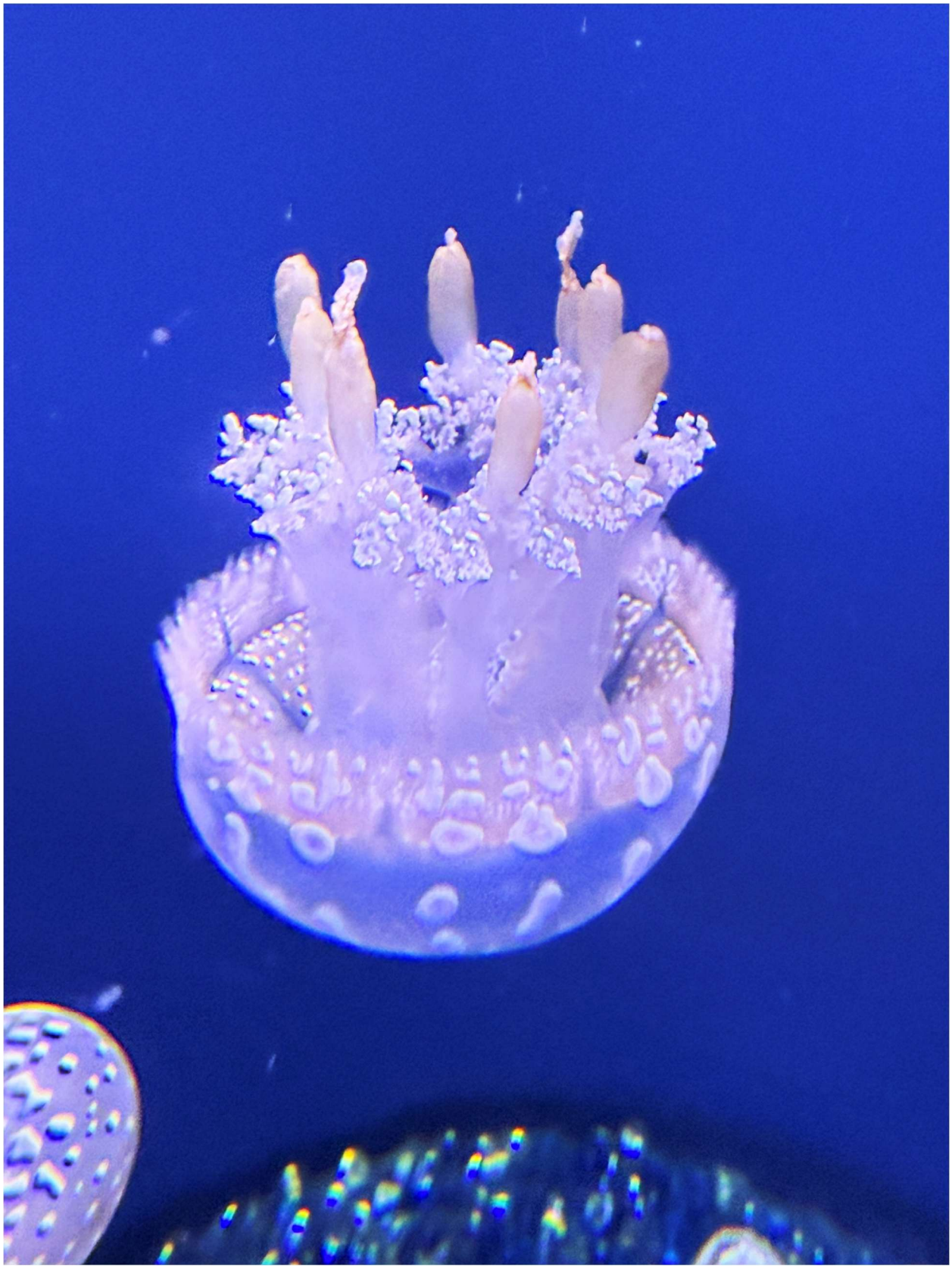



LOCAL CREEKS
FLOOR 3 2 1
RESTROOMS
STAIRS TO 2ND FLOOR
BITS CAFE
FLORIDA'S GULF COAST
EXPLORATION HALL


FLORIDA'S GULF COAST
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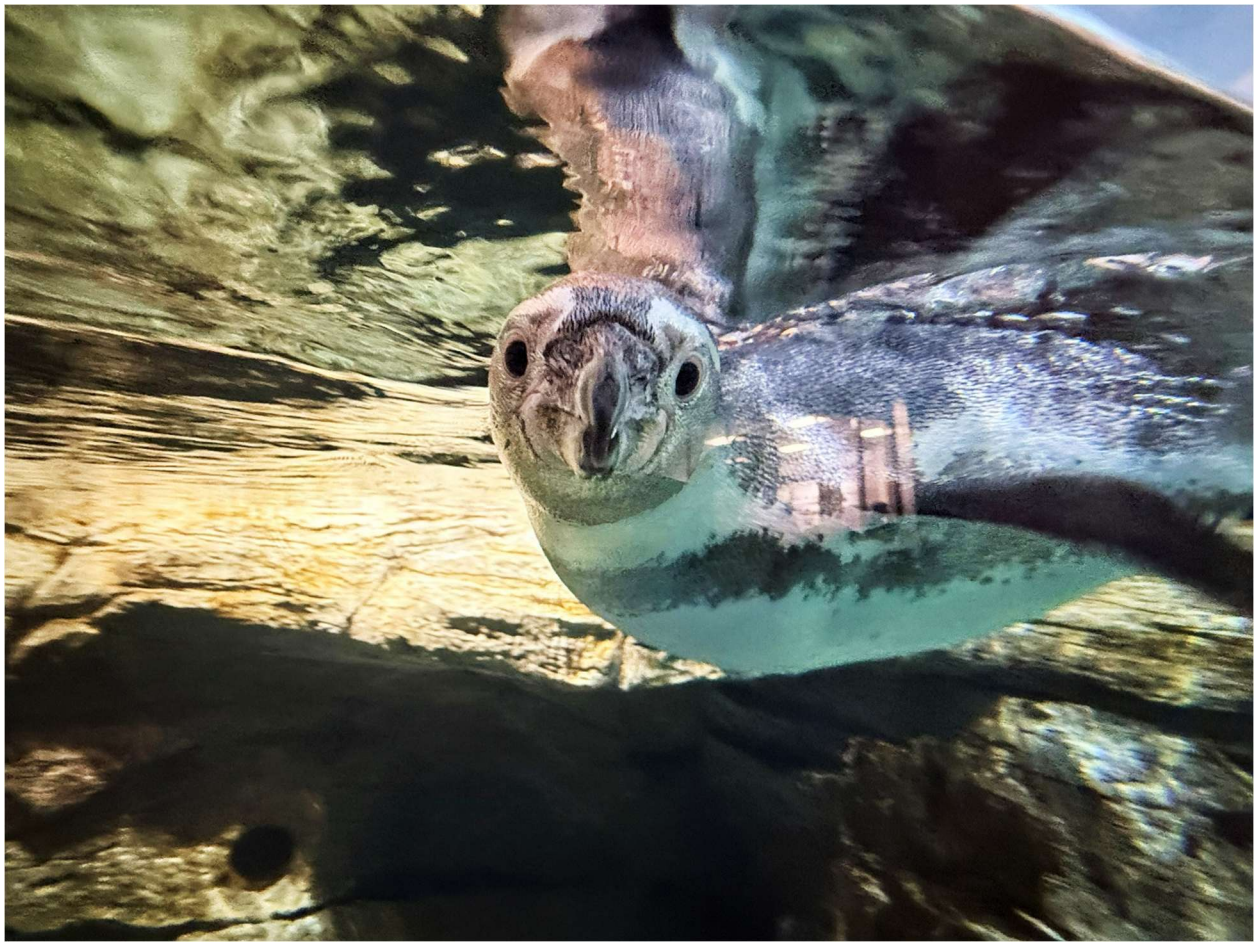












The last couple of times I went to aquariums (aquaria?) were on weekdays, in the early afternoon. They were peaceful places, with opportunities to sit for a while and serenely gaze at the sea creatures doing their non-stop swimming thing.

Today, though, was a bit different. First of all, it was late morning on a Sunday. Secondly, it was cloudy and showery day. The perfect combination for family outings to an indoor place, like, say, the new aquarium!

I recognized this beforehand, so I was mentally prepared to have squealing little knee-high urchins running madly about, and I was determined to not let them irk me.

Hence, I gave little thought to their inconvenience as I went right up to the glass – camera lens flat against the window for minimal background reflection – and snapped away with alacrity. Some pictures came out great, others (like the penguin photo above) showed some lighting from behind me that I did not effectively block out. He (she?) still looks pretty cool, I think.

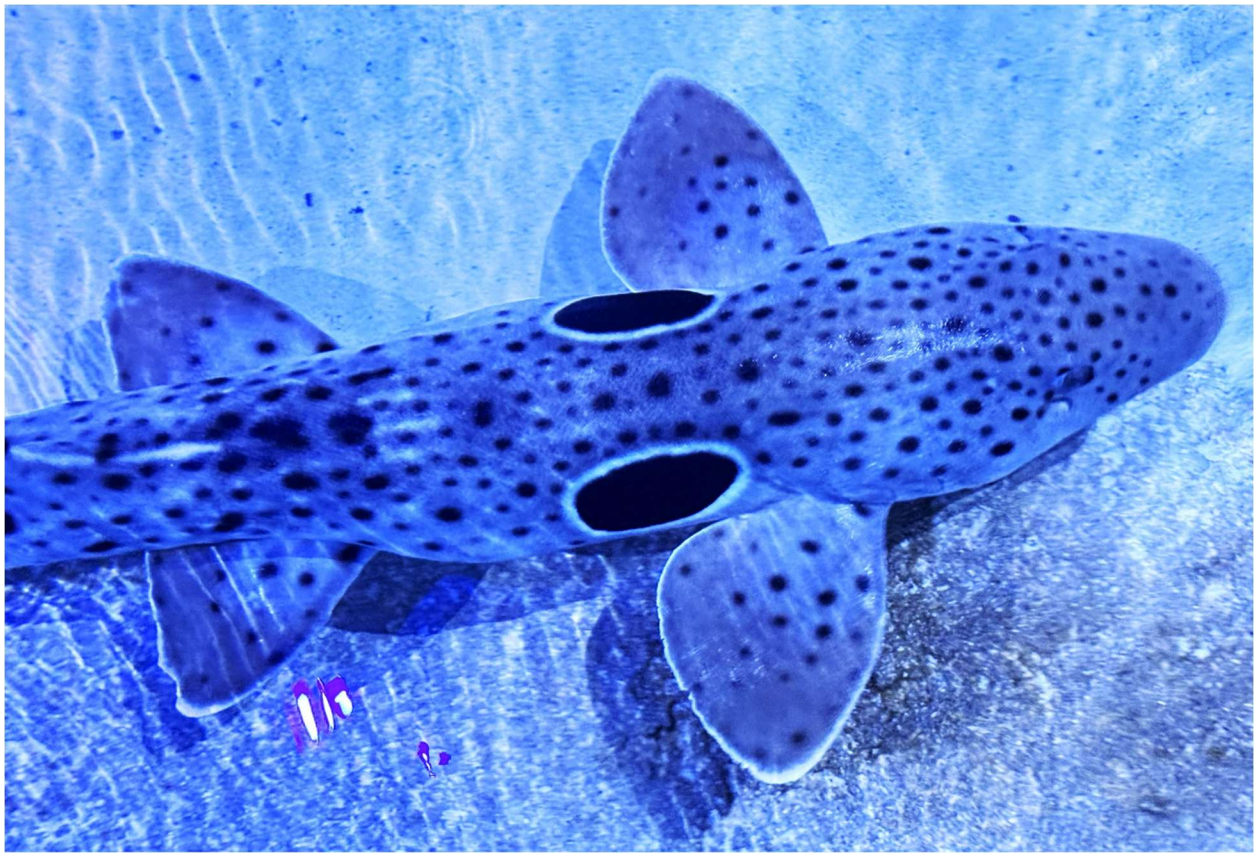
I could not tell you what 93% of these creatures are called, but they looked damn fine. I just provide the photos; somebody else can do the captions.











There are a few shallow “touch tanks” where you can reach into the water and pet rays, or certain kinds of sharks (like the one pictured above), or some other denizens of the deep. I think that red thing on page 9 was one. Anemone? Is that what that is? Maybe I should’ve read the placards along the way…

Anyway, Mote SEA was a good first step for RM26. But the day was not done. I had a second stop reserved not far away for mid-afternoon.