

Explore the power of the sea in Norfolk

Head east for the waterfront in downtown Norfolk and experience this one-of-a-kind maritime science museum and the adjoining retired Battleship Wisconsin. Both you and your kids will be thrilled – this amazing setup makes Chuck E. Cheese’s look downright tame!

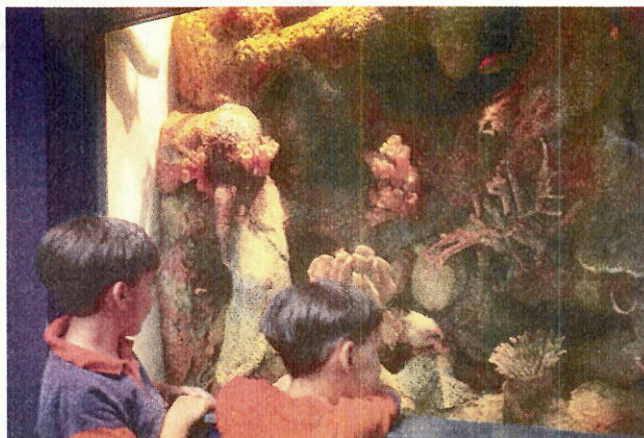
After you enter the lobby of the highly educational Nauticus, you immediately take the escalator up to the third floor. There you will find fabulous hand-on science and maritime exhibits, interactive theatres, and various aquariums.

There is so much to see and do it is hard to take it all in – a horseshoe crab touch tank, a shark lab, and the “Science on a Sphere” exhibit with its six-foot animated globe. In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration offers a number of other exhibits, even a weather station. The Nauticus Theatre shows a variety of digital high-definition nautical films on a giant screen, free with admission.

We especially enjoyed the Aegis Theatre, a specially designed command center theater that cleverly simulates a tense battle situation. As “commanders,” participants experience for themselves the intense pressure to make split-second decisions based on very little information with far-reaching repercussions.

Nauticus is an ideal destination for both school and scouting groups with a slew of programs, movies, and workshops from which to choose. They also provide suggested itineraries and group rates for 15 or more. As a matter of fact, we ran into local Boy Scout Troop 1829 from St. Matthias Episcopal Church while we were there. Then they were off for a night of camping at Camp Pendleton, a military reservation in Virginia Beach. (Nauticus hosts sleepovers as well.) Amazingly enough, Nauticus also offers SOL-based outreach programs in which the museum comes right to YOU! (The battleship is not included in this road trip, of course.)

Berthed at Nauticus, the USS Wisconsin (BB-64) is one of the largest and last battleships ever built by the U.S. Navy. Don’t miss the six-minute film, “Forward for Free-



Nauticus and the Battleship Wisconsin can be found in downtown Norfolk. The museum has hand-on science and maritime exhibits, interactive theaters, and various aquariums. (Photos courtesy of Nauticus)

dom,” which provides an interesting dramatic introduction by sailors who actually served aboard her.

Affectionately nicknamed “Whisky,” this Iowa-class fast battleship was launched in 1943 and earned five battle stars during World War II. It then served in the Korean War when enemy fire struck it for its first and only time, creating a four-inch hole. Its final use was during the first Gulf War in 1991, when it was outfitted with Tomahawk cruise missiles.

It’s hard to grasp just how incredibly mammoth this armored steel vessel is in every way. Her width once filled the entire Panama Canal with only one foot to spare on either side. At 887 feet long, she is

the length of nearly three football fields. She is quite tall, too, as tall as a 16-story building.

A city in itself, the battleship weighs a gargantuan 45,000 tons. She boasted the largest guns in naval warfare with each bullet weighing as much as a Volkswagen Beetle at 2,700 tons. It’s a wonder this mass of soldered steel could ever float for a second, let alone move across the world making significant wartime contributions for almost 50 years.

The second floor of Nauticus is the home of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. Its apt slogan is “local history, world events.” The museum begins by chronicling America’s naval battles at Yorktown, then during the Civil War and World War II, and

moving onto to describe today’s Navy. Admission is free.

On the ground floor of Nauticus, you will find the spacious Banana Pier Gift Shop filled with nautical gifts, toys and beach-themed items, as well as the casual Outtakes Café and some vending machines.

Admission is \$11.95 for adults, \$9.50 for children ages 4-12, and wee ones are free. AAA members should also inquire about discounts. For hours and additional information, please log onto www.nauticus.org or call (757) 664-1021. While online, check out their online exhibits and free children’s e-books for easy downloading.

If you are not too wiped out to push onto a nearby locale, the Chrysler Museum of Art is definitely well worth that extra oomph. This spectacular venue is filled with jaw-dropping masterpieces. Miraculously, admission is free. Much to our delight, our five-year-old was thrilled with several kid-friendly exhibits. Of course his favorite was the machine at the gift shop that created an Egyptian cartouche of his name, now framed in his room. I couldn’t agree more with the New York Times’ assessment, “The Chrysler Museum is one of the pleasantest places in the United States to while away the day.” **RPM**

Libby Carty McNamee, a local freelance writer and mother, was especially happy she chose to join the Army after seeing the sailors’ ultra-cramped quarters on the USS Wisconsin.

