

Birthday Party FAQ

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General Questions

What areas of the Aquarium are included in the private rental?

You and your party will have the whole Aquarium to yourself, with access to the Main Gallery, Green Room, Outdoor Patio, Science Lab, and Touch Tanks. You may choose to have your food set up either inside the Green Room, or outside on the Patio (weather depending).

Where can I find out more information about the add-on packages?

For full descriptions and offerings of our various add-on packages, please visit:

<https://healthebay.egnyte.com/dl/NFQwv6UzdD>.

How many guests are allowed?

We have a 65-individual limit (this includes your family). For any additional guests beyond the limit, there is a guest-overflow fee of \$5 per person over the age of 2 years, as a larger party will require more staff resources.

What happens if I have more guests than the limit?

If there will be more than 65 guests in attendance, please notify us at least one week prior to the party so we can book an extra staff member to help facilitate the party. We will keep track of the number of guests arriving, and check in with you before the end of the rental to go over the final number of guests in attendance. We will not charge you for any additional guests until after the party.

What is provided in the standard party package?

We provide six 6' x 2.5' rectangular tables, up to 65 chairs (at least 28 for the food tables), reusable tableware (plates, cake plates, bowls, forks, spoons, knives, cups), cloth napkins, and some serving utensils. We can also provide pitchers of filtered water upon request. Two staff members and 1-4 volunteers will also be provided and will facilitate your event and assist you with set-up, break-down, and clean-up.

Do I have to use the provided reusable tableware?

No, you are welcome to bring your own tableware if you prefer. With our move to environmentally friendly rentals, we do request you try to choose the most low-waste and sustainable option (e.g., paper, metal, or glass rather than plastic).

Can we bring our own decorations?

Yes! You are more than welcome to bring your own decorations. Even if you select one of our decoration packages as an add-on, you are welcome to add more of your own as well. Please be environmentally conscientious when selecting decorations and party favors—NO live animals, dried sea stars, shells, or other dried ocean artifacts. For pictures of our standard rental space and themed decoration packages, please visit: <https://healthebay.egnyte.com/fl/BIQBw6kbjM>.

What items am I not allowed to bring?

- Due to environmental reasons, we do not allow plastic water bottles or single-use plastic straws (plastic straws attached to juice boxes are okay since we understand this can be difficult to avoid)
- We do not allow the following decorations: glitter, confetti, balloons, bubbles, Styrofoam products, piñatas
- We encourage you to please be environmentally conscientious when selecting decorations and party favors—NO live animals, dried sea stars, shells, or other dried ocean artifacts
- We do not allow hand sanitizer as it is toxic to our touch tank animals. We do provide hand sanitizer dispensers at our exit for guests as they leave, and have two sinks with soap available in our restrooms.
- We do not allow alcoholic beverages to be consumed or served on the premises during birthday party rentals.

We would greatly appreciate it if you also informed your guests of the above restrictions.

Can my party be longer than 2 hours?

We are open to discussing options for a longer private rental time slot. Please email birthday@healthebay.org if you are interested in discussing the options.

Food & Drink

Do you provide food or drinks?

No, we do not provide any food or drinks other than water. You are more than welcome to bring your own food, drink, and cake and are responsible for pick-up, delivery, etc. Please keep in mind that we do not allow plastic water bottles or single-use plastic straws (plastic straws attached to juice boxes are okay). We understand it can be difficult to go completely plastic free, but we greatly appreciate any effort to help reduce our plastic consumption.

What do I do if I have a caterer?

If your caterer has any special requirements (e.g., griddles, propane tanks, etc.) we must be notified at least one week prior to your event.

Do you provide ice?

We do not provide ice. If you forget ice on the day of the party, there is a Vons located nearby in Santa Monica. For locations and directions to Vons, please visit: <https://bit.ly/2oCxN8m>.

Can I bring an ice cream cake?

We strongly discourage bringing ice cream cakes. While we do have a freezer/fridge, we cannot guarantee that there will be enough space, as the freezer is used by other departments at the Aquarium. We suggest bringing a cooler with ice or dry ice.

Can I bring water bottles?

We do not allow single-use plastic water bottles at the aquarium. We can provide pitchers of filtered water for your party upon request, and up to 65 reusable cups. We understand it can be difficult to go completely plastic free, so juice and soda in plastic bottles are allowed, but glass bottles or aluminum cans are strongly encouraged.

Is alcohol allowed for the adults?

We do not allow alcohol to be consumed or served on our premises.

Entertainment

Which animal species are part of the Touch Tanks (Standard Package)?

If you select the standard party package, you will have access to our touch tanks with staff-led interpretation. Touch tank animals include the following tide pool creatures: Sea Stars, Hermit Crabs, Sea Cucumbers, Abalone, Sea Urchin (may vary depending on animal accessibility) as well as Sharks and Rays (e.g., Swell Shark Nursery, Horn Sharks, Round Ray). Staff-led interpretation includes teaching guests how to properly touch the animals, answering questions the guests may have, and talking about the animals, including their adaptations, where and how they live, and fun facts. Your guests will then have the opportunity to interact with and touch the animals up close.

Which animal species are part of the Exhibit Presentation and Exhibit Feeding Demonstration (Add-on Packages)?

If you select either the “Exhibit Presentation” or “Exhibit Feeding Demonstration & Presentation” add-ons, guests will receive an in-depth presentation and be able to observe a staff feeding demonstration (if the “Feeding” package is selected) on one of the following exhibits of your choice:

- Sharks and Rays (e.g., Swell Shark Nursery, Horn Sharks, Round Ray)
- Rocky Reef (e.g., California Moray Eels)
- Under the Pier (e.g., local fish including California Halibut, Leopard Sharks, California Sheephead)
- Kelp Forest (e.g., Garibaldi, Giant Sea Bass)
- Tide Pool (e.g., Sea Stars, Hermit Crabs, Sea Cucumbers)
- Jelly Lab (e.g., Sea Jellies)

Which animal species are part of the Interactive Exhibit Feeding and Presentation (Add-on Package)?

If you select the “Interactive Exhibit Feeding & Presentation” add-on, guests can participate in hands-on feeding with staff and will receive an in-depth presentation on one of the following exhibits of your choice:

- Sharks and Rays (e.g., Swell Shark Adults & Pups, Horn Sharks, Round Ray)
- Tide Pool (e.g., Sea Stars, Hermit Crabs, Abalone)

Can all the children attending the party feed the sharks and rays?

For the safety and well-being of our animals, we only allow the birthday child to assist our staff in the feeding of our sharks and rays. Our aquarists help our animals maintain a regulated diet and measure a small amount of food for such presentations so as not to offset their normal feeding schedule.

Can we play music?

Yes! We have speakers in the Main Gallery that play through a Bluetooth sound system. In order to play music from this speaker, you must have a device capable of connecting to Bluetooth. We also have speakers in the Green Room that play through a computer that is plugged into our sound system. In order to play music from this speaker, it must be played through our computer. Our computer can access Spotify, YouTube, or a personal music file (please send your file to us beforehand so we can ensure it plays). Please note, the speakers in the Green Room and the Main Gallery are separate systems.

Can I bring in my own craft?

Yes, you are more than welcome to bring in your own craft. Please keep in mind that we DO NOT ALLOW glitter, confetti, seashells, dried sea stars, or other dried ocean artifacts. If you bring in a craft that requires materials like paint, glue, etc. please note that you are responsible for cleaning up the craft materials by the end of the party. If you are interested in adding on a take-home party hat craft for your guests to create and wear during the party, we do offer an add-on package that includes sea star crowns, wave crowns, and shark visors. This add-on also includes a Heal the Bay branded colored pencils set that guests can take home (up to 30 sets per package).

Can I bring in other entertainment?

You are more than welcome to bring in third party entertainment. Please let us know at least 48 hours in advance so we can set up the space accordingly. Please note that balloon and bubble artists are not allowed due to environmental concerns.

Directions & Parking

How do I get to the Aquarium?

For directions to Heal the Bay Aquarium, please view [our detailed directions document](#). Please note: it can be tricky to find the aquarium and it may be helpful to send out the directions document above to your guests.

What do I do when I get to the Aquarium?

When you arrive on the day of your party, please plan to arrive at 9:00 AM. Ring the doorbell at our main entrance (wooden ramp with large white doors), and a staff member will let you in so you can begin setup.

Parking Notice

The City of Santa Monica has begun construction at the Santa Monica Pier. Due to this, our loading and unloading zone is currently unavailable. Guests may still park in Lot 1 North, but should be aware of potential construction-related blockages. Lot 1 South remains fully open and available for parking.

For further questions, please reach out to birthday@healthebay.org or please call 310-393-6149 x206 if you need any assistance the morning of your rental. We are happy to provide a cart to assist you with loading or unloading.

Where do I/my guests park?

There are a number of options around the pier as well as in Santa Monica. The parking lot next to the pier (called "Santa Monica Beach Parking" in Google Maps) is the most conveniently located, but there are other lots on top of the pier and next to Hot Dog on a Stick. For parking availability in Santa Monica, please visit: <https://www.parkme.com/santa-monica-parking>.

Fees & Cancellations

What payments are needed at the time of booking?

Your non-refundable deposit of \$300.00 is required at the time of booking to hold your reservation. This deposit will be applied to your total bill. If your reservation is made less than 3 weeks prior to the event date, full payment is required at the time of booking. The remainder of the payment must be received within 14 days prior to the event date.

What happens if I have more guests than the 65-guest limit?

If there will be more than 65 guests (this number includes your family) in attendance, please notify us at least one week prior to the party so we can book an extra staff member to help facilitate the party. For any additional guests beyond the limit, there is a guest-overflow fee of \$5 per person over the age of 2 years, as a larger party will require more staff resources. We will keep track of the number of guests arriving, and check in with you before the end of the rental to go over the final number of guests in attendance. We will not charge you for any additional guests until after the party.

What happens if my party goes over the 2-hour limit?

You should arrive at 9:00 AM for set up, and will need to have the party completely broken down by 11:45 AM. We will provide staff and volunteers to help with set-up, clean-up, and break-down. Failure to meet this time frame will result in an automatic charge of \$250.

What happens if I need to cancel my reservation or change the date of my reservation? Cancellations/ date changes made more than 21 days in advance will not incur a penalty. Date changes made less than 21 days in advance of event date will be charged a \$100.00 rescheduling fee. Cancellations made less than 21 days in advance of the event date will be charged the full rate.

Are there any other fees I should be aware of?

Any damages to the facility determined by staff members will result in a fee to be determined by management.

Do I have to tip?

Tipping is not required, but always appreciated. Our staff and volunteers are dedicated to making your party as much fun as possible! If you would like to leave a gratuity, it can be made through cash, or credit card.

