Mexican shark swim is a fin(e) attraction

By Ian Stalker

Iliana Rodriguez is confident that those who take part in Xcaret's Sharks Interactive Adventure won't experience any teething pains.

In fact, the seven nurse sharks participants share an enclosed lagoon with are quite docile around people, although not all park visitors are initially convinced of that, says Rodriguez, spokeswoman for the Riviera Maya park.

"We always get people who say, 'No way,'" Rodriguez says of some guests who reject the idea of sharing water with the sharks, which are around 1.5 meters in length and weigh around 60 kilograms.

Even those toying with the idea of swimming with the predators are usually initially reluctant. "At first they're concerned and then we explain that there's nothing to fear," Rodriguez reports.

But Rodriguez-- who herself has swam with the nurse sharks, which are fed fish by the park -- says those marine creatures aren't aggressive around people and are native to the area, which is why Xcaret chose them for the experience.

Indeed, those sitting partly submerged in the lagoon can have a shark placed on their underwater laps and safely pet it, although visitors are warned against touching the creatures while swimming, which might

make the sharks uneasy. People can, however, swim close to the predators.

No visitor has ever been harmed by a shark, and Rodriguez says the sharks "basically ignore" their guests, unlike the dolphins Xcaret guests can also swim with and which interact with people.

The shark experience lasts for 45 minutes and groups of 12 visitors who are accompanied by four Xcaret trainers enter the lagoon four times a day. The park provides visitors with masks, snorkels and fins before they enter the water. Guests are also given insights into reproduction, physiology and other facets of shark life.

Rodriguez says those who swim with the sharks will gain a new outlook into creatures that often arouse fear in people.

"They come out with a different perspective on sharks," she states before joking, "and all their limbs."